

Your Employment, Business and Education Magazine  
for Today's Diverse-Abled Community

# DIVERSEability

FALL 2023 magazine

**THE  
LATEST  
INCLUSION  
TECH**

**WAYS TO  
FOSTER  
WORKPLACE  
INCLUSIVITY**

**THE WORLD'S  
MOST  
ACCESSIBLE  
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**HENRY  
WINKLER**  
**THE HAPPIEST DAYS**





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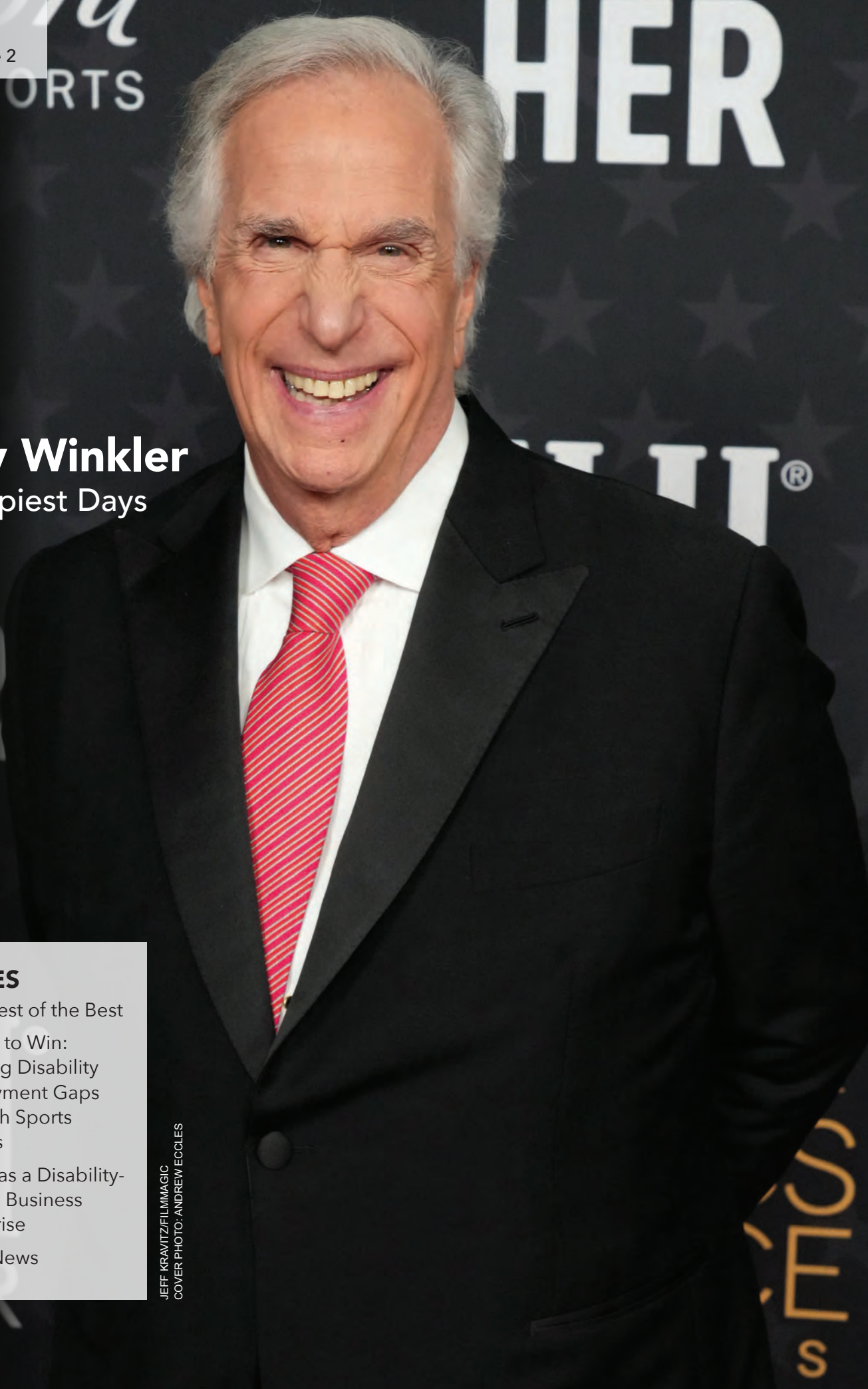
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JEFF KRAVITZ/FILMMAGIC  
COVER PHOTO: ANDREW ECCLES







Supplier  
Diversity

TO  
GE  
TH  
ER

WE CAN BUILD BEYOND  
WHAT'S POSSIBLE



2023  
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Novi, MI

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Disability-Owned Business Enterprises (DOBEs)

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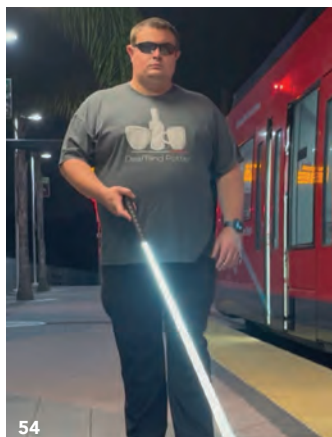
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# Finding Happiness



**D**IVERSEability Magazine enjoyed getting to know the dynamic and engaging Henry Winkler as he shared his memories of *Happy Days* and what it's like for him to live with dyslexia. While Winkler's academic struggles initially kept him from the stage, he graduated from the Yale School of Drama with an MFA and pursued his passion for acting. He memorized lines before auditions to avoid having to read; explaining that he was embodying the "essence of the character." Read more about

him and his "Happiest Days" on page 70.

Whether your happy place is on stage, in the office or on the road, this issue has everything you need. "7 Networking Tips to Meet Your Career Goals" on page 32 includes actionable tips to advance your career. If you're an entrepreneur, "Need to Save Money to Start a Business? Here's the Best Approach" on page 62 will give you the insight you need to get started.

If travel is on the horizon for you, check out the "Top 10 Most Accessible Cities in the World" on page 76. These delightful cities include gastronomic delights, awe-inspiring architecture, rich history and more. There is truly something for every interest.

I endeavor to find happiness every day by enjoying time with family and friends, trying recipes from my own travels and reminding myself to slow down. Wishing you success and happiness this fall and beyond.

*Kat Castagnoli*

Kat Castagnoli  
Senior Managing Editor, *DIVERSEability Magazine*

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**Louis Chesney** is the program manager of neurodiversity training for RethinkCare, overseeing the day-to-day operations and expansion of RethinkCare's neurodiversity course content and consultation approach. Prior to RethinkCare, Chesney championed a hiring program for autistic adults at a global technology company. As an individual who experienced selective mutism first-hand, Chesney continually aims to make a positive impact on those who are underserved. He co-authored *ECHO: A Vocal Language Program for Easing Anxiety in Conversation*, a Plural Publishing book designed to help older children and teens needing social communication support.



**John Register** is a two-time Paralympian, Paralympic Games Silver Medalist, Persian Gulf War veteran and TEDx motivational speaker. He embraced a "new normal" in becoming an amputee following a misstep over a hurdle while training for the 1996 Olympic Games, after participation in two consecutive Olympic trials. Register teaches others through his "Hurdling Adversity" speeches and podcasts to "amputate their fear and embrace their new normal," as they discover "stories within themselves."



**Brady Rhoades** is an award-winning writer and author who's worked for the *Los Angeles Times* and *Orange County Register*. He's written stories on Gen. Colin Powell, Serena Williams, Alex Rodriguez, the crew of *Shark Tank* and others for DiversityComm Inc.'s magazines.



**Natalie Rodgers** is the submissions editor and a writer at DiversityComm Inc., the publisher of six diversity-focused professional magazines. With a passion for inclusion and popular culture, Rodgers earned her B.A. in American Studies from the California State University of Fullerton, where she wrote on an array of topics that combined the two subjects. When she isn't writing, Rodgers enjoys reading graphic novels, watching movies and finding new adventures with her friends.



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# DIVERSEability magazine

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A man with a prosthetic leg is in a crouched starting position on a paved path. He is wearing a grey zip-up hoodie, black athletic pants, and blue and white sneakers. His right leg is a prosthetic, and he is using his left hand to touch the ground for balance. The background shows a park-like setting with trees and a fence.

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# 2023 BEST OF THE BEST

**A**t DiversityComm, Inc., we believe that diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) are the foundations of success for any business or organization. Tracking the trends, staying aware of forward-thinking DEI policies and being listed on the top lists of diversity and equity leaders is what it's going to take for businesses, institutions and nonprofits to continue growing and performing. According to one study from Ethisphere, ethical companies outperform their competition by 7.1 percent. Though another study from i-Sight found that those on key DEI lists and rankings made more than double the profits of comparable companies. Our Best of the Best list seeks to recognize the organizations that have gone above

and beyond to create more inclusive, equitable workspaces where diverse talent can be recruited, developed and retained. We recognize them for their commitment to uplifting values and fostering a great workplace culture. In the words of Mona Lisa Faris, our Founder and Publisher, "Diversity is your superpower," she said, "Embrace it. When you embrace and understand the value of diversity, you have the capability to maximize your creativity, problem-solving skills, inclusivity which ultimately leads to increasing profitability. It allows you to compete on a whole other level businesswise, both internally and in reputation." For more about our methodology, please visit [diverseabilitymagazine.com/methodology](https://diverseabilitymagazine.com/methodology).

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2023 Top Disability-Friendly Companies

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**For more about our Best of the Best methodology and information to receive a survey invite for the next evaluation, scan here:**





# 2023 Top Disability-Friendly Companies

3M	Brown Brothers Harriman	Etsy
AbbVie	Brown-Forman Corporation	Excellus BlueCross BlueShield
Accenture	Caesars Entertainment	Exelon Corporation
Adobe	CAI	Expedia Group, Inc.
ADP	Capco	Experian
Advance Auto Parts	Capital One	Express Scripts
Aetna	CareSource	EY
AIG	Cargill	Fannie Mae
Airbnb	Caterpillar Inc.	Fidelity Investments
Alaska Airlines	CBRE	Fifth Third Bank
Albertsons Companies Inc.	CDW	First Data
Alight Solutions	Centene Corporation	First National Bank (F.N.B. Corp.)
Allina Health	CenturyLink	Fiserv
Allstate Insurance Company	Change Healthcare	Florida Blue
Ally Financial	Charles Schwab Corporation	Ford Motor Company
Altria Group, Inc.	Chevron	Franklin Templeton
Amazon.com, Inc.	Children's Hospital of Philadelphia	Freddie Mac
AMC Entertainment, Inc.	Choice Hotels	Froedtert & The Medical College of Wisconsin
Ameren Corporation	Chubb	Gartner, Inc.
American Airlines	Cigna	GE Healthcare
American Electric Power	Cisco Systems, Inc.	GE Vernova
American Institutes for Research	Citigroup, Inc.	General Dynamics Corporation
American Water	Citrix	General Mills, Inc.
AmerisourceBergen	Colgate-Palmolive Company	General Motors
Amgen	Comcast NBCUniversal	Giant Eagle, Inc.
Amtrak	Commonwealth Care Alliance	GlaxoSmithKline plc
Aramark	Compass Group	Goldman Sachs & Co.
Argonne National Laboratory	Conduent Inc.	Google LLC
Associated Bank	Consolidated Edison Company	Grant Thornton LLP
Astellas Pharma US, Inc.	Corning Incorporated	Gucci
AT&T Inc.	Covestro LLC	HCA Healthcare
Atrium Health	Cox Communications	HCSC
Avanade	CSX Transportation, Inc.	Highmark Health
AXA	Cubic Corporation	Hilton
BAE Systems, Inc.	Cummins Inc.	Honeywell
Ball Corporation	CUNA Mutual Group	HP
Ballard Spahr LLP	CVS Health	HPE
Bank of America	DaVita	Humana
Barclays	Dell Technologies Inc.	Huntington Bank
Bayer	Deloitte	IBM
Baylor Scott & White Health	Delta Air Lines, Inc.	Illumina
BD	Deluxe	Indeed
Best Buy Co., Inc.	Discover	Insight Enterprises
Biogen	DISH Network, LLC	Intel Corporation
Black Knight, Inc.	Dominion Energy	International Flavors & Fragrances Inc.
BlackRock	Dow Inc.	Intuit
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, Inc.	DTE Energy Co.	Iron Mountain, Inc.
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan	Duke Energy Corporation	Jabil
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Rhode Island	Dun & Bradstreet	Jacobs
Blue Shield of California	DuPont	JCPenney
BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee	DXC Technology	JLL
BMO Bank N.A.	Eaton Corporation	Johnson & Johnson
BNSF Railway	Ecolab Inc.	Johnson Financial Group
BNY Mellon	Edison International	JPMorgan Chase & Co.
Boehringer Ingelheim	Elevance Health	Kaiser Permanente
Booz Allen Hamilton	Eli Lilly and Company	Kohl's
Boston Consulting Group	Enel North America	KPMG LLP
Boston Scientific Corporation	Entergy Corporation	L'Oréal USA
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## 2023 Top Disability-Friendly Companies, continued

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Lenovo	PPL Corporation	The Travelers Companies, Inc.
LexisNexis	PRIDE Industries	The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center
Liberty Mutual Insurance	Prime Therapeutics LLC	The Vanguard Group, Inc.
Lincoln Financial Group	Principal Financial Group	The Walt Disney Company
LinkedIn	Procter & Gamble	Thermo Fisher Scientific
Lockheed Martin	Prudential Financial	Thomson Reuters
Lowe's Companies, Inc.	PwC	TIAA
lululemon athletica	Qualcomm	T-Mobile US Inc.
Lumen Technologies	Qualtrics	Tracfone
Lyft	Quest Diagnostics	Trane Technologies
M&T Bank	Qurate Retail Group	TruStage
Macmillan Learning	Randstad	Tufts Health Plan
ManpowerGroup	Reckitt	U.S. Bank
Marriott International	Reed Smith LLP	Uber Technologies, Inc.
MassMutual	Regeneron	UKG (Ultimate Kronos Group)
Mastercard Incorporated	Regions Bank	Unilever
Mathematica	Royal Caribbean Group	Union Pacific
Mayo Clinic	RR Donnelley	Unisys Corporation
McKesson Corporation	RSM US LLP	United Airlines, Inc.
Medtronic plc	RTI International	United Natural Foods, Inc.
Meijer	RTX	United States Steel Corporation
Merck & Co., Inc.	Rush University Medical Center	United Technologies Corporation
Meta Platforms, Inc.	S&P Global	UnitedHealth Group
MetLife, Inc.	Salesforce, Inc.	Univera Healthcare
Micron Technology, Inc.	Sandia National Laboratories	Unum Group
Microsoft Corporation	Sanofi US	UPS
MIT Lincoln Laboratory	SAP America, Inc.	USAA
Moderna, Inc.	SAS Institute	UScellular
Moody's Corporation	ServiceNow	UT Southwestern Medical Center
Motorola Solutions, Inc.	Shepherd Center	Verizon Communications Inc.
Nestlé Health Science	Siemens	Viasat
Nestlé Purina PetCare Company	Simon Property Group, Inc.	Victoria's Secret & Co.
Nestlé USA	Sodexo, USA	Visa Inc.
NetApp	Sony Electronics Inc.	Vistra Corp.
New York Life	Southern California Edison	VMware, Inc.
Nielsen	Southern Company	Voya Financial
Nike, Inc.	Southwest Airlines Co.	W.W. Grainger, Inc.
Norfolk Southern Corporation	Spaulding Rehabilitation Network	Walgreens
Northern Trust Corporation	Starbucks Corporation	Walmart Inc.
Northrop Grumman Corporation	State Street	WellCare Health Plans, Inc.
Northwestern Mutual	Stellantis	Wellington Management
Novant Health	Steptoe & Johnson LLP	Wellmark BCBS
Novartis Corporation	Stryker	Wells Fargo & Company
Numotion	Synchrony	Whirlpool Corporation
NVIDIA Corporation	Takeda Pharmaceutical Company Ltd.	Windstream Holdings
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Old National Bank	TD Bank	WM
OppenheimerFunds, Inc.	TDS Telecom	World Wide Technology
Oracle	TEKsystems	X
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Palo Alto Networks	The Guardian Life Insurance Company of America	ZVRS and Purple Communications
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# Strategies to Maintain Mental Health at Work



Does your job ever negatively affect your mental health? Challenging projects, conflicts with co-workers or changing work duties can all affect your mental health. According to Mental Health America, 78% of workers agree that workplace stress affects their mental health. Thankfully, there are steps you can take at your job to help protect yourself. Here are five tips to improve your wellness at work.

## Be Patient With Yourself

Getting back into the workforce, starting work for the first time or just changing roles at your current job are significant adjustments. Be patient. You'll need to get used to new people, tasks and schedules. When everything happens simultaneously, it may not be easy to manage. Give yourself time to adjust to new surroundings and activities. When you're training for a job, taking in so much information can be stressful. Try not to be hard on yourself and ask for help when needed.

## Communicate With Your Supervisor

Your supervisor isn't just the person who assigns work and approves your timesheet. Your supervisor is a source of support. For

example, if you have problems at work with a particular task or interacting with a specific co-worker, communicate honestly about it with your supervisor. If you're uncomfortable discussing issues with an immediate supervisor, reach out to someone else who can help, like a human resources staff member.

## Take Breaks

If you're having a stressful day at work, sometimes it helps just to take a break. Breaks are built into your day to ensure you don't overdo it and work too long. Use these breaks to clear your mind, get some fresh air and relax. Bring a book to work and read for a while during your break. Take a breather in a way that helps you relax. You'll feel refreshed and return to work, ready to start your next project. Try not to skip the breaks your boss offers you. We never dreamed of missing recess when we were kids, so let's not neglect our well-deserved breaks as employees.

## Celebrate Your Accomplishments

Focus on the tasks and projects you finished during the workday. Once you track your finished assignments, you'll see that you achieved more than you thought! Cele-



brate that you completed half of the big filing project your supervisor assigned you. Give yourself credit for making most of the calls on your long call list. It can be overwhelming if you only focus on everything left to do. Recognize what you accomplished today, and it can give you positive energy to finish up tomorrow. Each step you complete gets you closer to finishing your "to-do" list.

## Practice Self-Care

Self-care can include meditation, hobbies, taking a nap or journaling. Simply resting on your day off is a great way to practice self-care. Try not to pack too many busy errands and other work into your non-work days. Use some of that time for self-care. There are also resources specifically designed for employees who need assistance with their mental health. These can be found at [dol.gov/mentalhealth](https://www.dol.gov/mentalhealth).

Sources: Ticket to Work, Department of Labor





## WANT TO CHANGE THE WORLD? JOIN A NATIONAL LABORATORY



Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and Idaho National Laboratory, both part of the U.S. Department of Energy, promote a vibrant culture of inclusive diversity that fuels growth and drives innovation. Through strategic collaboration, employees apply skills that significantly contribute to solving the nation's most critical safety and security challenges. Our employees utilize world-class science and technology to push the limits of creativity in ways no other entity can.

# The Dos & Don'ts of Disclosure on the Job



Deciding if, when and how to share disability-related information with a prospective or current employer can be overwhelming, especially if you have an invisible disability. The decision-making process requires answering several personal questions that may differ with each employment experience.

There is no single right or wrong approach to disclosing a disability. The disability disclosure consideration process can include questions like: “Do I have an obligation to disclose?” “When is the right time?” “How much information does the employer need?” and “How will disclosing the information affect my employment?”

Before you disclose your disability, here are some “dos” and “don’ts” to consider first:

## **Dos:** **When you need an accommodation**

Deciding when to disclose can be a difficult choice for a person with a disability. If you have a hidden disability, such as a brain injury or post-traumatic stress disorder, knowing when to disclose your condition can be a real dilemma.

Under the ADA, you can request an accommodation at any time during the application process or while you are employed—even if you did not ask for one when applying for

a job or after receiving a job offer. So when should you disclose that you have a disability? In general, you should disclose your disability when you need to request a reasonable accommodation—when you know that there is a workplace barrier that is preventing you, due to a disability, from competing for a job, performing a job or gaining equal access to a benefit of employment like an employee lunch room or employee parking.

## **Know who to disclose to**

This can be tricky. Many employers have their own in-house procedures that detail how they handle accommodation requests. Check your employee handbook or your company’s intranet for this information. Also, if you have an EEO office or a human resources department, they can assist you. The other option is to talk to your manager or supervisor directly.

## **Know how to disclose**

According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), you only have to let your employer know that you need an adjustment or change at work for a reason related to a medical condition. You can use “plain English” to make your request, and you do not have to mention the ADA or use the phrase “reasonable accommodation.” Once you disclose, then the interactive process should begin. At this point, your employer can

ask for limited information about your disability and your need for accommodations.

## **Don'ts:** **Disclose too soon**

Many people with hidden disabilities may feel that they are not being completely honest with an employer if they do not share everything about their disability up front at the time of their interview. Just remember that you are not obligated to do so. When you disclose, just provide basic information about your condition, your limitations and what accommodations you may need.

## **Disclose too late**

Don’t wait to disclose until after you begin to experience work performance problems. It is better to disclose your disability and request accommodations before job performance suffers or conduct problems occur. Employers do not have to rescind discipline that occurred before they knew about the disability, nor do they have to lower performance standards as a reasonable accommodation. Remember, the purpose of an accommodation is to enable a qualified person with a disability to perform the essential functions of the job. So, disclose when you first realize you are having difficulties.

## **Disclose to everyone**

Remember that you have a right to keep information about your disability private. It is not necessary to inform coworkers and colleagues about your disability or your need for accommodations. While they may be aware of the accommodations, especially if you are allowed to take extra breaks or you have a flexible starting time, they are not entitled to know why. Your employer is required by the ADA to keep your disability and medical information confidential and to give it to managers and supervisors only on a need-to-know basis.

## **Most importantly, do your homework**

No one knows more about your disability than you do, so tell your employer what you think you need, but also research other accommodation options such as a flexible start time or working from home part of the time.

Source: Job Accommodation Network





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**Brian Skeats,**  
Ability@Vizient DNA Chair



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# ABLE Accounts: What You Should Know

Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) accounts are tax-advantaged savings accounts that are available to eligible individuals with disabilities. By opening an ABLE account, you may be able to save more money each year to help you pay for disability-related expenses.

But how do you open an ABLE account and what exactly can the funds be used for? In this article, we're answering the top three questions about ABLE accounts and how they may help you on your path to financial independence.

## Who is eligible to open an ABLE account?

As of 2023, the ABLE Act limits eligibility to people with disabilities who had an onset of disability before they turned 26. As of 2026, however, the ABLE Age Adjustment Act will increase the age of ABLE eligibility to "before the age of 46." If you meet the eligibil-

ity criteria, you may then choose the state in which you plan to open your account.

More than half of the states in the country have launched ABLE programs. You are not required to establish your account in the state where you live. To help you decide in which state you want to open an account, use the Three-State Comparison tool and review tips for opening your ABLE account. Then, visit the program website of the state you choose and complete the application. In 2023, Social Security disability beneficiaries, their family members, friends and employers can deposit it up to a combined total of \$17,000 into an ABLE account.

## What can ABLE account funds be used for?

ABLE account funds can be used for qualified disability-related expenses (QDE). A QDE is any expense the beneficiary incurs as a result of the disability. These may include expenses related to education, housing, transportation, employment training and support, assistive technology, personal support services, health care expense, financial management, administrative services and other expenses that help improve health, independence and/or quality of life.

Although you do not need to submit re-

ceipts for the expenses, you should keep them along with other documentation of the expenditure. If you're unsure whether something is a QDE, you can check with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), the only organization that can make that decision.

## How do ABLE accounts affect my Social Security disability benefits?

If you receive SSDI, are working and deposit part or all of your earnings into an ABLE account, Social Security still considers this deposited money as "countable earnings" and applies work incentives to determine if you're engaging in substantial gainful activity (SGA). However, deposits made into an ABLE account by others, such as your family members, friends and employers, are not considered countable income for determining SGA.

However, if you receive SSI benefits, the ABLE Act sets further limitations. The first \$100,000 in your ABLE account would be exempted from the SSI \$2,000 individual resource limit. When your ABLE account exceeds \$100,000, your SSI benefit payments would be suspended until the account balance falls below \$100,000. It is important to note that while your eligibility for a benefit payment is suspended, this has no effect on your ability to receive or be eligible to receive medical assistance through Medicaid.

Source: Ticket to Work







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# Diverse Networks Create Pathways to Acceptance

**M**iranda McCarthy and Laura Nietupski appear to be happy and healthy associates with Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company (MassMutual). Miranda is a Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Consultant and Laura is an Insurance Operations Senior Director. Each has been with the company for over 10 years. Both have potentially debilitating disabilities.

Miranda has a health condition called cyclical vomiting syndrome (CVS), a migraine like disorder, where she can be incapacitated for hours on end. She has also been diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Laura has been diagnosed with general anxiety disorder which can be especially disruptive. She can become unexpectedly irritable and irrational by some social standards.

Both have built successful careers for themselves at MassMutual. Each has become a leader in their professional specialty and an advocate for colleagues with disabilities.

How have these women been able to thrive? What resources have they been able to access? What impact are they having on the company and its diversity journey? The answers to those questions can be traced to MassMutual's Adapt business resource group (BRG) and its relationship with Disability:IN, a global network for disability inclusion.

"I've been a member of Adapt pretty much my entire career," says Miranda. "I initially joined because my husband suffered a massive stroke soon after we began dating, and my nephew is autistic." It wasn't until later that she was diagnosed with CVS and ADHD.

For Laura, the COVID-19 pandemic heightened awareness of mental health issues across the corporate landscape and the isolation of work-from-home worsened the effects of her disability.

"It's easy to hide when you're neurodivergent. It's an unseen disability: no one would ever know," she says.

Either of these women could have chosen to remain "unseen" by not divulging their disabilities. But that's not who they are.

Miranda grew increasingly weary hiding her CVS diagnosis: "It's hard, as a woman in management, to continually show up as a servant leader. It's even harder when you're pretending." The pandemic-induced increase in mental health awareness helped her realize that she was not being her full self.

Through Adapt, Miranda became familiar with Disability:IN.

"Our BRG had, for years, focused on workplace issues like assistive technology and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) access," Miranda says. "That began to shift from accessible tools and buildings, and I think we saw Disability:IN's unwavering advocacy for the *people* with disabilities as a spark that could affect real change here at MassMutual."

Miranda explains that Disability:IN's efforts reach a zenith at the organization's annual meeting each year. The two recently returned from 2023's meeting in Orlando.

"We see companies really throwing down the gauntlet in terms of making significant changes to create cultures of acceptance for people with disabilities," she says. "It's like Pride! You can be who you are and there was no judgement." The organization has been a catalyst for Miranda, helping her "come out" as neurodivergent and as a person with an unseen disability.

Laura's story intertwines in a similar way.

"I've been here 12 years. I come across as a straight shooter and a hard charger. A lot of that is because of my disability. My involvement in Adapt has given me the safe space to become my authentic self," she explains.

Laura, whose mind trends to the analyt-

ical, highlights Adapt's progress over the years.

"Adapt has a big role in our corporate diversity efforts," she says. "We've grown from providing accessibility advice to truly advocating for those with any kind of disability, neurological or physical. In 10 years, we've grown from 100 members to over 500 employees. We've helped to change the company's benefits offering to include more mental health care and other wellness benefits. We've seen a real – and organic – change in the corporate culture. There is even time allotted in the workweek to talk about triggering issues."

Laura is quick to point out that her involvement with Adapt has helped connect her with other parts of MassMutual's diversity efforts.

"Adapt is a conduit to what's possible with disabled-led companies. Adapt's involvement with Disability:IN has helped our own supplier diversity folks tap into an ever-increasing pool of talented vendors and service providers. It's a great, mutually beneficial, circular partnership. These relationships and partnerships are impacting the company's bottom line, and that's essential."

For Miranda and Laura, Adapt's President and Secretary, respectively, their work at MassMutual has been surprisingly fulfilling.

"The change we've seen over the past several years has been unexpected and organic," Laura says. "It's really cool to watch this company's diversity journey!"

Miranda echoes the sentiment: "We're so fortunate to be able to bring our full selves to work. It's quite something to combine your paycheck, your passion and who you really are to create opportunity for everyone!"

The MassMutual logo, featuring three blue dots of increasing size to the left of the word "MassMutual" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font.





# Finding the Right Mentor



A good mentor guides and advises based on their experience and learned wisdom, so choosing a mentor carefully is important. We are answering some common questions about selecting the right person and asking them to be your mentor.

## Why do I want a mentor?

Knowing what you're trying to accomplish by working with a mentor and what kind of assistance you need may help you identify the right person. For example, are you interested

in finding work in a new industry, or are you already employed and looking to move up in your current company? Do you want in-depth career advice, or is there a particular problem you need help solving? Once you ascertain your specific need, you can search for an appropriate mentor.

## Who is the right person?

Look at your current network, including your family, friends and people you may know from previous work or volunteer experience.

Is there someone with the knowledge or skill that matches your goal? Maybe they have the kind of position in their company that you would like to have.

It's often easier to work with a mentor you can meet with in person rather than online, so first check your existing contacts to find a mentor in your community. However, if you don't know someone personally, try researching professional or trade associations or companies in your field of interest. Then identify a few individuals and look at their websites or





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## CAREERS

LinkedIn pages to get an idea of whether their experience might be a match for you. Whether it's an acquaintance or a stranger, you won't go wrong if, when you contact them, you can speak knowledgeably about their work.

### What do I say?

Once you know who you'd like to contact, keep in mind that you're asking for their time and attention. Be courteous and specific about why you think they'd be a good mentor for you and what you're hoping to accomplish through the mentorship. Also, let them know how often you expect to contact them or meet with them and what each meeting would include. Consider suggesting that you will create an agenda or outline of what you'd like to discuss during each meeting.

### How do I make the contact?

If possible, start with a phone call or in-person meeting. You can simply ask for some of their time to discuss an issue or to get career advice. Inviting someone to join you for coffee or a brief meeting in their office is a professional way to begin a relationship. If the




meeting goes well, asking them to be your mentor can then flow naturally. If it doesn't feel comfortable, you may want to find another mentor. Remember, a good mentor will be enthusiastic about and invested in your success.

If you don't already know the person, send a brief email that asks for a short amount of time (say, 15 minutes) and includes what you'd like to discuss and why you've chosen to ask them for a meeting. This initial email is not the time to ask them to be your mentor. You should have some sort of relationship before asking for that kind of commitment.


### Final thoughts

There's no one-size-fits-all type of mentoring. A person may have several mentors throughout their career. Some mentoring relationships are brief coaching sessions; others last for years. However, the one constant is that you'll get the most benefit from mentoring by committing the time, energy and effort to understand your own goals and to make the most of your mentor's counsel and time.

Source: Ticket to Work



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# The Caregiving Industry is Changing for the Better

Caregiving has remained a popular occupation in many communities, whether you are caring for an aging family member, your own children or helping to care for someone else outside of your family.

But the industry has long struggled to provide the funds and resources necessary for someone to work as a caretaker without needing to take on another job, pulling time away from other responsibilities.

But thanks to a new bill that has passed for those caring and needing care, caregivers are finally going to be provided with the resources they deserve.

Signed by President Biden in April, a new executive order was put in place that will expand access to affordable, high-quality care and provide support for care workers and family caregivers. This executive order, which includes more than 50 directives for agencies

across the government, is the most inclusive set of executive actions any president has ever taken to make care more affordable and accessible for hardworking families and further

ening our care infrastructure,” the National Alliance for Caregiving stated to the White House. “With these actions, the Biden administration is taking historic steps towards im-

**“The Biden administration is taking historic steps towards implementation of our nation’s first-ever National Strategy to Support Family Caregivers and towards addressing the harsh effects—and inequities—associated with caregiving for millions of American families.”**

- National Alliance for Caregiving

support care workers and family caregivers.

“The National Alliance for Caregiving applauds the Biden administration’s efforts to address our nation’s caregiving crisis by signing 50 executive actions aimed at strength-

plementation of our nation’s first-ever National Strategy to Support Family Caregivers and towards addressing the harsh effects—and inequities—associated with caregiving for millions of American families.”

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The bill comes at a time when child care and care for elderly and disabled adults has increased in price and decreased in compensation. In the last decade, the cost for long-term care for veterans has increased by over 40% while the workforce has decreased by 8%, and the care workforce has seen more than 50% in turnover rates. Under this new order, the hope is that care will not only be more accessible and affordable to those who need it, but will also be fairly compensated to those who are providing the care.

The order consists of five sections that cover the importance and methods in which the livelihoods of care workers and those they are caring for will be improved. Sections one through four cover the following:

### Section 1: Policy

The first section of the executive order details how child care and long-term care have officially become critical to communities throughout the country. Early childhood education is crucial to giving children a strong start in life while long-term care helps people with disabilities to participate in their communities in an accessible, dignified way. Care

work has been deemed a matter of national security as access to care encourages the recruitment, readiness and retention of current and future military service members.

### Section 2: Compensation and Job Quality

The second section of the executive order details the ways in which different federal departments will work to improve the compensation and job quality of care workers. Amongst the numerous coverages outlined in the order, some of the most notable include the secretary of health and human services' new responsibility to increase health care coverages and compensation for care workers providing federally funded services, implement strategies to expand mental health support for care workers, and expand training and professionals to create a more informed, enjoyable working environment.

### Section 3: Accessibility and Affordability

The third section of the ordinance calls for an increase to affordable high-quality care for workers delivering federally assisted projects.

This will include lowering the cost of care for families eligible for federal programs, identifying potential opportunities to reduce current barriers to eligibility for certain federal programs, increasing access to child care through employment services and partnerships to be provided to help fund those who need access to care work.

### Section 4: Expanding Options for Families by Building the Supply of Care

The fourth section details the ways in which this order will provide families with more options for high-quality, long-term home- and community-based care and early learning services. This will include the implementation of rules and policies, furthering education for care workers of children with disabilities and distributing this care to Native tribes.

To learn more on how this bill will help those in the caregiving industry or who need caregiving services, visit [whitehouse.gov](https://whitehouse.gov) for more information.

Sources: Family Caregiver Alliance, The White House

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# 7 Networking Tips to Meet Your Career Goals

Building your network is vital no matter where you are in your career journey. For first-time job seekers, networking can help you gain opportunities in your ideal work environments and obtain employment. Seasoned employees can get references, find assistance in moving up the ladder, secure partnerships for their company and attain job opportunities. No matter your situation, here are seven networking tips that will help you make those connections.

## Attend Events

The best resource you have for making new connections is through events. Conferences and trade shows are great places to meet like-minded professionals with similar goals. Most everyone is there to learn, network and create more opportunities for themselves, so you might as well be the first person to make a possible connection.

## Set Goals

It's always nice to attend an event with a friend, but if you do, be sure to split up. Spending all your time with people you already know negates the purpose of networking. Set a goal to meet a certain number of new people at each event. Networking is like cold calling: The more you do it, the less scary it becomes. If you're nervous about being rejected, try greeting the newcomers to the event. They'll be eternally grateful. As you consistently meet new people, you'll realize you no longer have that urge to retreat to the safety of your familiar faces, and you'll find more people wanting to meet you!

## Go in With Confidence

When it comes to encouraging a friend regarding their abilities, it's easy to point out all their redeeming qualities and assets. Still, when it comes to advocating for ourselves, it can be difficult. In the same way you assess your friends' qualities, take a minute to evaluate your wants and attributes and how they would be helpful to someone else. Then, take that knowledge and talk about your contributions in the way you would talk about someone else's achievements. The more confident you are in your abilities, the more someone else will realize what a valuable connection you would be.

## Join Professional Groups

Take part in local organizations, participate in meetups and get involved wherever and whenever you can. Once you've decided to join an organization, don't just sit back and relax. Participate actively by joining a committee or taking a leadership role. By doing so, you'll learn more, meet people and make yourself memorable.

## Use Those Business Cards

One of the most popular and convenient ways to connect with your new contacts in the future is to exchange information through business cards. If you don't already, get some business cards made that detail your basic information. At a minimum, business cards should include your name, position, company, email and/or telephone number. Bring more business cards than you believe you'll need, and make sure to get the other person's card as well.



## Listen

Show that you are genuinely interested in what your contacts have to say. Ask open-ended questions and absorb the information they share. Then, try to keep note of the important aspects of the conversation. Like any other affiliation, people value a relationship in which the other person not only engages in both sides of the conversation but demonstrates an effort to remember the details and importance of their interaction.

## Follow Up

You can meet as many people as you'd like, but if you never utilize their contact information, you may lose your connection. Within 48 hours of meeting an individual, send them a follow-up email reminding them of who you are—reference specifics about what you discussed at the event. If you mentioned meeting for lunch, follow up with a specific invitation; if you suggested talking by phone, set a time for the call. Acting within 48 hours helps cement you in the other person's mind and starts building the relationship.

## Integrate Online and Offline

Incorporate your real-world networking contacts into your social networking efforts. When you meet someone at an event, follow up with an invitation to connect on LinkedIn or another social media site. Similarly, meeting up with your online contacts offline can be a great way to take those relationships to the next level. Try organizing a meetup of one of your most useful online networking groups.

## Give as Much as You Get

As you continue to grow your network, share your knowledge and expertise with others. Become part of their networks and offer to help or connect people when you see an opportunity. Just as you and a friend continually support each other, be there to support the meaningful business associations in your life.

## Plan for the Long-Term

Although making a connection and exchanging contact information is a solid start, concentrate on forming long-term, mutually beneficial relationships. You may not need a connection today, but someday you might.

Sources: U.S. Small Business Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs



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# Playing to Win: Bridging Disability Employment Gaps Through Sports Insights

By John Register

The employment challenges faced by people with disabilities remain a complex issue requiring concerted efforts from governments, organizations, advocates and society. While progress has been made around the world since the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990 by George H.W. Bush, there is still much work to be done to ensure equal opportunities and inclusivity in the workforce for all individuals, regardless of their abilities.

I recently attended the World Para Athletics Championships in Paris, France. The performances left me amazed, and I was genuinely thrilled to witness the remarkable progress in Para Athletic sports since my competitive days. It's incredible to see amputee athletes achieving extraordinary distances on par with those achieved by Olympians. Let me clarify my stance: I'm not advocating for Para athletes to compete with their Olympic counterparts. In my opinion, such a comparison would undermine the unique value of the Paralympics and imply that the goal is Olympic-level performance. On the contrary, I want the Paralympics to establish itself as a distinctive and marketable entity.

I noticed that amidst the athletics, many spectators watching had an underlying tone of ableism.

I overheard conversations from sponsors, donors, fans and staff that these athletes were "superhuman." I also heard charitable discussions from the same people. They were glad to be at Charley Stadium because "it was the right thing to do."

I believe these two ends of the disability awareness spectrum, [superhuman and charitable right thing to do] spoken by temporarily abled-bodied individuals (TABS), are a microcosm of what exists on a macro level.

Let's take the term superhuman, for example. Referring to someone with a disability as superhuman inadvertently reinforces harmful stereotypes and diminishes the person's experience. While more than likely well-in-

tioned and intended to praise the athlete's resilience, accomplishments or performance, it suggests that their achievements or abilities are exceptional solely because they have a disability.

This label can reinforce a sense of otherness, making it more challenging for society to recognize and address systemic barriers and discrimination faced by disabled individuals.

The charitable factor is equally harmful. Donors and sponsors believe their gifts to the organization check a box on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The optics can feel like a parent-child relationship between the leadership and the athletes.

Look at many of the Paralympic organizations around the world and their donors and

inclusion efforts.

The harsh reality is that many of these athletes with disabilities, who travel the world and win Paralympic medals for their country, will not be hired by companies because of the stigma and stereotypes against them.

I spoke a bit about ADA at the onset of this article. Yes, we have come a long way, especially regarding Section 504, designed to protect individuals with disabilities in programs and activities that receive federal funding. Still, the stark reality is that many physical structures have open access. Awareness has been raised, but these laws have yet to successfully ensure equal workforce opportunities.

A U.S. State Department program I helped

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**Research shows that employees with disabilities bring tangible advantages to companies, including increased innovation and improved productivity.**

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sponsors. Rarely do any of the leadership have a disability. Neither do their staff or boards of directors. The litmus test comes if they view people with disabilities as a value or a charity when the economy turns for the worse. Does CSR still fund the cause they said was so important, or is funding pulled back for other more critical needs of the company?

The mindset shift from both superhuman or charitable spectrums must be seeing the sport as an economic and business imperative, as outlined in Accenture's report, "Getting to Equal: The Disability Advantage," highlighting the benefits of disability inclusion in the workforce. The research shows that employees with disabilities bring tangible advantages to companies, including increased innovation and improved productivity. The study quantifies the return on investment from disability

expand for athletes with disabilities under Secretary Hillary R. Clinton is the Sports Envoy Program. This program is an initiative to leverage professional athletes' influence and popularity to promote cross-cultural understanding and engage underserved communities worldwide. This program recruits athletes who are passionate about making a positive impact on society and communities, both domestically and internationally. These athletes, known as Sports Envoys, travel to different countries to participate in sports-related activities, workshops and events that foster cultural exchange and address social issues. My expansion was to include athletes with disabilities in the talent pool. While many professional athletes can share their sports journey with a country, the Paralympic athlete can expand the conversation by sharing how they adapt to



a world not built for them. The conversations immediately go deeper and well beyond sport.

Athletes with disabilities are highly adaptable and bring a problem-solving mindset into any organization. In the fast-changing world we live in, this hiring, retaining and promoting a person with a disability is not charity or superhuman observable nice-to-have; it is a business imperative.

We must continue to educate the public, employers and policymakers about the abilities and contributions of people with disabilities and offer action steps to break down stereotypes and biases.

We must implement inclusive hiring and workplace policies that promote diversity and provide reasonable accommodations to employees with disabilities.

We must elevate people with disabilities to leadership roles, executive teams and boards of directors to demonstrate that people with disabilities are high-functioning contributors to society.

And governments must strengthen and enforce existing laws while considering additional incentives for companies that prioritize hiring people with disabilities or building or renovating structures with a universal design framework.

As I made my way from Charlety Stadium and crossed by the Arc de Triomphe on a brisk Parisian morning walk, I was reminded of Bastille Day. This significant event occurred on July 14, 1789, during the French Revolution. The Bastille symbolized royal tyranny and oppression, and its capture by revolutionaries marked a pivotal moment in the fight for liberty, equality and democracy.

No more should people with disabilities be seen as “superhuman” or “a charitable CSR cause.” They should be seen for who they are—productive contributors in society who are living life exactly as they see fit.

I hope that the fight for disability equality in the workplace achieves such a pivotal turning point that the athletes who participated in the World Para Athletics Championships will be able to find gainful employment in the countries they represent after their sporting days are completed.

*John Register is a professional keynote speaker. He works with business professionals who are ready to Hurdle Adversity, Amputate Fear, Embrace a New Normal Mindset, to Win Life's Medals. Find out more about him at [johnregister.com](http://johnregister.com).*

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# Simple Ways to Foster Workplace Inclusivity Through Accessible Documents

By Dax Castro

Today, diversity and inclusion are on the tip of most people's tongues. But how, exactly, can we create this inclusive work environment everyone is talking about? Most topics are centered around race and gender identity. They are not wrong. Those topics are definitely core considerations for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI). But one topic that is often left out is accessibility. An environment that includes accessible digital content like videos, PDFs, Word docs and PowerPoint files provides access for all people and fosters a sense of belonging. An accessible workplace leads to diverse ideas, higher employee retention and increased productivity.

## Why Document Accessibility?

One crucial part of being inclusive is making sure that the documents used internally and externally, including marketing materials, can be accessed by everyone. When we mention accessibility, most people either ask, "What's that?" or say, "OMG! That is just too hard!" The truth is by following a few simple principles, you can make your content more accessible without doing much at all.

Let's talk about six simple strategies to improve accessibility you can start doing today:

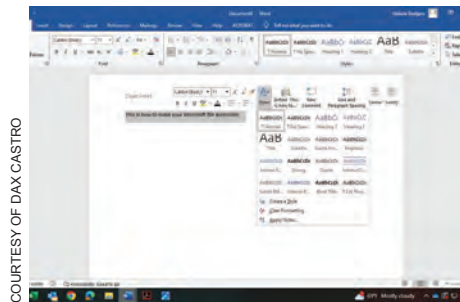


Figure 1. Microsoft Word makes assigning accessible heading styles easy and allows you to format them to fit your document.

## Utilize Clear and Simple Language

One of the fundamental aspects of accessibility is using clear and simple language in all written communications. Avoiding jargon, complex sentence structures and technical terms ensures that information is easily understood by a broader audience, including individuals with cognitive disabilities, learning difficulties or limited language proficiency.

Leaders can encourage the use of plain language by providing guidelines or training sessions to employees who create or edit documents.

These guidelines should include suggestions such as:

- Use concise and straightforward sentences.
- Define acronyms and technical terms when first mentioned.

Leaders who promote the use of clear and straightforward language demonstrate their commitment to inclusivity and make information more accessible to everyone regardless of ability.

## Implement Proper Document Formatting

Document formatting plays a crucial role in ensuring accessibility. By following best practices, leaders can create documents that are easier to navigate, comprehend and interact with. Here are some key considerations:

- Structure with headings: Use hierarchical heading tags (e.g., H1, H2, H3) to organize content. Headings act as organizational anchors that empower people using assistive technologies, such as screen readers, to navigate through the document more efficiently.

## Provide Accessible Visual and Non-Visual Information

When implementing proper document formatting, it's important to consider individuals who are colorblind. Colorblindness affects as many as one in eight males and can make it challenging to understand color-coded information accurately. The easiest thing to do is avoid relying solely on color to convey meaning in their documents. Instead, use additional visual cues or alternative methods to differentiate information. For example, if using color to represent different categories in a chart or graph, consider incorporating shapes, patterns or labels as well. Considering the needs of colorblind individuals demonstrates a commitment to inclusivity and ensures information is accessible to everyone, regardless of their visual abilities.



Figure 2. Using symbols helps differentiate one line from another regardless of the ability to distinguish colors.



*"Living with a disability can be challenging. Persons with disabilities are often navigating the impacts of their health conditions on their personal and professional lives. I'm proud to work for a company committed to ensuring our workplace is equitable and inclusive."*

**Diédra**

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## Add Alternative Descriptions to Images

Images, graphs and charts should be accompanied by descriptive alternative text. This text conveys the meaning of the visual content to individuals who are blind or visually impaired. Alternative descriptions should be two to three sentences that describe the main takeaway or purpose of the image, chart or graph. Adding quantitative data is always key when the visual image includes numbers, totals or trends.

## Provide Accessible Document Formats

Offering documents in various formats caters to the diverse needs of employees and clients. Here are a few accessible document formats to consider:

- **HTML:** Web-based content increases the likelihood of compatibility with assistive technologies and allows for easy navigation and customization of content.
- **PDF:** When sharing PDF files, ensure they have accessible features. This includes adding tags, bookmarks and alternative text for images. Validating the accessibility of PDF files using manual checks and tools beyond Adobe Acrobat is crucial. Passing the Acrobat Checker does not ensure accessibility.
- **Plain text:** When the content is simple enough, providing plain text versions of documents provides access to basic information in a simple and accessible format. However, a well-structured PDF or HTML file should be your initial approach.

By offering documents in accessible formats, organizations empower individuals with disabilities to independently access and engage with the information, fostering a more inclusive workplace.

## Caption and Transcribe Multimedia Content

We see and hear multimedia content daily in the form of videos or podcasts. Multimedia content without captions or transcriptions will reach far fewer consumers. Many younger viewers, not just individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, now experience video content with captions by default. Including transcripts and closed captions in videos reaches a larger audience and is accessible for everyone.

Figure 20 shows the gap in percent employment between those with and without disabilities by state in 2015. States with the highest gap were concentrated from the Atlantic Coast to Missouri and Arkansas. In thirty (30) states, the employment percentage gap was 40 percentage points or greater. The highest gap was found in Maine (50.1%), Kentucky (47.4%), and the District of Columbia (46.1%). In only three states was the gap less than 33.3% - Wyoming (22.0%), South Dakota (30.9%), and Utah (32.5%).

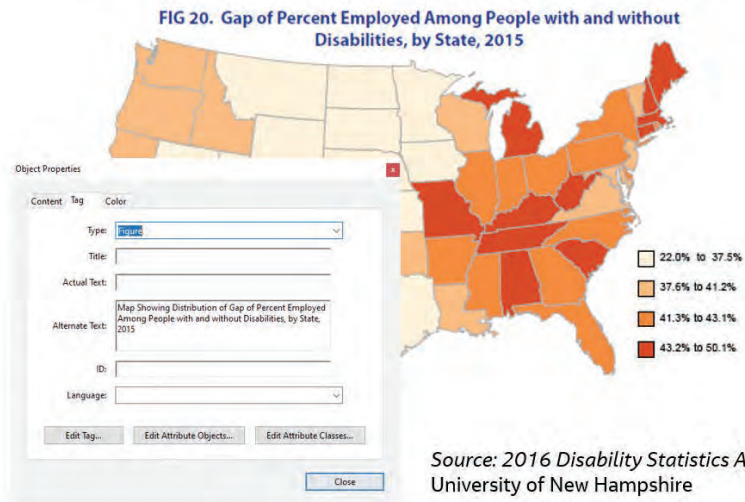


Figure 3. Supporting your image data with body text and an image description is the best of both options for accessible content.

## Final Thoughts

Promoting inclusivity in the workplace involves making internal and external documents and marketing collateral accessible to all individuals. By implementing these six simple strategies, leaders can enhance acces-

Accessibility Unraveled have created a downloadable handout titled “10 Things You Can Do to Improve Accessibility Without Being an Expert.” This resource provides practical tips and actionable steps that leaders can easily implement within their organizations, regard-

If you provide content in formats such as Microsoft Word or Adobe PDF, that content is more accessible to people with disabilities when it's provided with semantic structure, including headings, lists and tables.

Source: Harvard University

sibility, foster inclusivity and attract a more diverse talent pool. Embracing accessibility not only benefits individuals with disabilities but also promotes a culture of inclusivity and equal opportunity for all.

## Start Today

To support leaders in their journey toward document accessibility and inclusivity, we at

less of their level of expertise in accessibility. The handout covers a range of accessibility considerations, including document structure, alternative text for images, color contrast and more. Visit our website, [bit.ly/A11y10](http://bit.ly/A11y10), to download the handout and begin your journey towards a more accessible and inclusive workplace today.

Source: AccessibilityUnraveled.com



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# 5 Ways to Launch Your Neurodiversity Efforts

By Louis Chesney

Discussions around Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE&I) continue to evolve. Although neurodiversity has been on the radar for many organizations for quite some time, 2023 has brought a renewed focus as many move their initiatives forward with a new sense of urgency.

In our discussions with clients, companies are shifting their mindsets from simply embracing neurodiversity in the workplace to making it a reality. Business and HR leaders are keenly aware that the more diverse teams are cognitively, the faster they solve problems and the more likely they are to exceed their financial targets. Fortunately, companies like Microsoft, JP Morgan Chase and EY have paved the way with their neurodiversity at work initiatives.

With effective models already in place, and the right roadmap, tools and support, companies can move from idea to implementation and make neurodiversity an integral part of their larger DE&I strategies to build a truly inclusive workforce and achieve their business objectives.

## Addressing today's workplace challenges

Due to misconceptions and stigmas about their conditions, neurodiverse individuals—who comprise about 10-20% of the global population—face challenges and barriers in the workplace that can prevent others from seeing their unique strengths, talents and abilities.

In fact, one might argue that not recognizing and appreciating the qualities of neurodiverse individuals, which provide a clear competitive advantage and fill a void in the workplace, is a missed opportunity for both the individual and the employer.

Some of the most significant challenges employers face today—shortage of talent, quiet quitting, high turnover, skills deficits and low engagement—can all be addressed by building inclusive and equitable workplaces that value and appreciate neurodiverse individuals for who they are as well as for what they contribute.

By doing so, companies can tap into a wealth of creative thinking, problem-solving skills and innovation, enabling them to stand apart from their competitors.

Companies that recognize neurodiversity as a business imperative and a way to uphold their corporate values will be those that can attract the best talent, compete in the marketplace and meet—or even exceed—their business objectives. Take SAP, where neurodiverse employees developed a technical fix worth an estimated \$40 million in savings.

Yet the goal of neurodiversity in workplace initiatives shouldn't be to satisfy corporate social responsibility or diversity goals alone. Rather, companies should prioritize initiatives because of the advantages that building an inclusive and equitable workplace has on supporting the needs and well-being of all employees.

## How to launch new neurodiversity initiatives

If your company has started discussing incorporating neurodiversity

initiatives into your DE&I strategy, now is a great time to take a closer look—here's how to get started.

### Raise awareness

Before launching any new initiative, you must first assess your employees' awareness of neurodiversity, which, surprisingly, can reveal gaps across your population. One industry survey found that 91% of neurodiverse and neurotypical employees alike don't know how common neurodiversity is.

Additionally, more than one-third (37%) of employees with invisible disabilities do not disclose their conditions because they fear discrimination and don't feel it's worth the effort to gain support, a recent study found. Conducting a company-wide survey can give you insight into a lack of understanding, which can inform your next steps. This may include training to educate employees, address fear and stigma, and dispel myths and stereotyping.

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"One might argue that not recognizing and appreciating the qualities of neurodiverse individuals, which provide a clear competitive advantage and fill a void in the workplace, is a missed opportunity for both the individual and the employer."

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Additionally, offering employees event opportunities can allow them to learn and have meaningful interactions with neurodiverse individuals. Neurodiversity Employment Community Conference and Stanford Neurodiversity Summit are two events to consider.

### Identify a champion

A champion, or team of champions from senior leadership, a specific business unit or an employee resource group (ERG) who can spearhead new efforts, is critical to the success of any initiative. Champions ideally have a personal connection to neurodiversity and should:

- Stay up-to-date on best practices.
- Provide education.
- Encourage employee participation in events and activities.
- Foster relationships with talent networks or job placement agencies that support neurodiverse individuals.

### Take a strengths-based approach

As your organization prioritizes neurodiversity recruiting efforts, look for individuals with skills that your current workforce lacks. You can also focus on strengths during the interview process. For exam-



ple, de-emphasize formal interviews and instead assess job-specific and technical skills. Or, provide interview questions and an agenda in advance so candidates can prepare.

Training and onboarding should also align with all employees' unique learning and communication styles. Therefore, it's a good idea to offer various modes of instruction, such as:

- Self-paced modules.
- On-the-job training.
- Classroom training.

When building teams, match individuals with complementary personalities, which prevents the 'echo chamber' effect and promotes creative thinking and innovation.

## Prioritize universal design

Historically, companies that prioritized neurodiversity on the job placed neurodiverse individuals in hubs separate from the organization. Today, however, we're seeing the move to universal design. Universal

design is the idea that anyone in an organization can get the maximum benefit from their work environment without having to disclose their condition. It also means individuals are no longer singled out or siloed.

An example of universal design is providing everyone access to an intranet site with resources, accessibility tools, and accessibility, ERGs and external employment support networks.

## Equip leadership with the right tools

All employees, regardless of their cognitive differences, should feel comfortable expressing their needs to meet their job demands and feel


more accepted and valued in the workplace. With e-learning and training opportunities, leadership can help guide neurodiversity efforts and build team cultures that provide support when needed.

Training also guides leaders on the best practices for employee training on neurodiversity efforts and ensures anti-discrimination policies are established and enforced.

## Fueling business growth with a neurodiversity strategy

Expanding DE&I programs to include neurodiversity initiatives will continue to be a critical area for organizations looking to address the most significant workforce challenges, drive innovation and stay competitive.

Neurodiverse individuals bring a wealth of skills and strengths to the workplace that many companies lack but are critical to growth and scalability. Yet doing so requires a shift in mindset from simply viewing neurodiversity efforts as a corporate social responsibility to a strategy that is critical for building a stronger workforce, developing new ideas and spurring exponential business growth.



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# Including Neurodivergent Workers: Job Descriptions and Interviewing



**E**mployers interested in hiring neurodivergent workers should review job descriptions and interview processes to make sure they are inclusive and welcoming to candidates with disabilities. A few small changes can make a significant difference.

## **Job Descriptions**

Employers should ensure their job descriptions use language that is inclusive and makes it clear that the organization welcomes neurodivergent people. Inclusive language should be used consistently throughout job descriptions. While writing these descriptions, managers and HR staff should distinguish between what jobs “require” and what is “preferred” or

“nice-to-have.”

Many companies currently use a “more is better” approach to develop their job descriptions for open positions. These employers often provide detailed job descriptions with “requirements” that could inadvertently deter qualified neurodivergent job candidates from applying. Many neurodivergent people may take these requirements literally, assume that they are not qualified for a job, and thus not apply. In addition, these listings may overwhelm potential job candidates and make it difficult for managers of disability-focused hiring programs to identify neurodivergent candidates.

Similarly, some organizations use job de-

scriptions that include very general skill requirements that can apply to multiple settings, such as “strong communication skills” or “ability to work in a team environment.” Descriptions like these can make some neurodivergent people, especially autistic people, apprehensive about applying for a position due to the vagueness of the phrases being used or differences in social skills/reading social cues. Employers should clarify if qualifications or tasks are not essential to accomplish the job, or not include non-essential qualifications at all. Essential qualifications and tasks—the job duties that a candidate must be able to perform—should, of course, stay in the listing.

Employers should also consider making job





requirements easier to understand. For example, employers could offer alternative formats, such as video clips to accompany text-based job descriptions. When writing a description, use plain language wherever you can. Experienced and qualified candidates of all backgrounds find complex job listings difficult to understand, and this challenge is especially acute for many neurodivergent people.

## Interviewing

Conventional job interviews can be inaccessible for many neurodivergent people whose communication styles may vary widely. At a minimum, interviewers should receive training on what to expect and how to conduct

interviews with neurodivergent candidates. These training sessions should discuss what to ask and how to interpret verbal and non-verbal responses to reduce biases that can put neurodivergent candidates at a disadvantage.

Avoid vague or open-ended questions such as “What can you bring to the table?” which can be confusing or interpreted literally. Instead, ask direct questions, such as:

- “Can you talk about a key project on which you recently worked for an employer and how you contributed?”
- “What work did you perform for this project? How did it support the success of the project?”
- “Can you describe some of your core strengths and talents? How do these assets help you thrive in jobs or volunteer roles?”

Interviewers should also consider the environments in which the interview process occurs. Noisy and distracting environments can create discomfort for neurodivergent job candidates with sensory access needs. In fact, some companies invite job candidates to visit their offices prior to beginning interviews or the selection processes to help these candidates familiarize themselves with the office setting. Virtual or remote interviews can also benefit many neurodivergent candidates.

Certain hiring practices can benefit all candidates, including neurodivergent ones. Work to ensure that job interviews are as structured as possible and ask specific questions. Explain in advance what will happen in the interview. Employers may also consider providing the interview questions in advance. Many candidates, including neurodivergent job seekers, provide stronger responses when they know what questions will be asked during the interview and have time to prepare their answers.

Some organizations now forgo the typical interview process by taking a skills-focused approach toward hiring, for example, by conducting a series of interviews for job candidates that focus on specific skills or completing certain tasks. Businesses may also adjust how they conduct interviews or make use of resumes and other skill-centered documents. Many employers now have candidates complete skills assessments or participate in work trials to determine their qualifications or fit for the organization.

Other organizations host large-scale screening events for potential employees, which allow them to gain a sense of candidates’

strengths, interests and fit for open positions. Some employers also offer specialized training sessions to help prepare neurodivergent employees for the work environment. These sessions sometimes focus on employability or soft skills training for areas such as interpersonal skills, teamwork and ways to communicate in the workplace. An employer may tell applicants what the hiring process involves, and may ask applicants whether they will need a reasonable accommodation for this process. You can learn more from the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), which has information on accommodation ideas for autistic workers and those with other conditions, like ADHD and PTSD.

Note that employers should not ask an applicant if they have a disability during a pre-offer interview. The candidate has the right to decide whether or not to voluntarily disclose a disability, such as when requesting a reasonable accommodation.

Indeed, many neurodivergent people may choose to disclose their disability during the interview as that is a key aspect of their identity and experience. It is important to understand that employers may not use their knowledge of an applicant’s disability to discriminate against the applicant. Employers must also keep any medical information on applicants confidential. Visit JAN’s page on medical inquiries to learn more. You can learn more about an employer’s obligations with respect to disability-related inquiries before and after a job offer is extended, as well as during employment, from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s (EEOC) website.

In certain circumstances, employers can also invite applicants to voluntarily self-identify as a person with a disability when the question is asked for affirmative action purposes.

Federal agencies also engage in self-identification efforts to meet obligations under Section 501 of the Rehabilitation Act to support affirmative action and recruit, hire, retain and advance workers with disabilities. In doing so, federal agencies must take certain steps to protect workers’ confidentiality.

This article was originally printed by and with permission from the Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN).

Source: Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN)

# Certify as a Disability-Owned Business Enterprise

By Natalie Rodgers

Regardless of where you are in your business or entrepreneurial journey, you understand the difficulties that can come with being your own boss. Not only do you have to manage every aspect of your own company, but you have to find ways to best fund, expand, recruit and sustain your business.

If you've been on the fence about seeking your business certification, now is the perfect time to officially become Disability-Owned Business Enterprise (DOBE) certified. With a certification, you'll gain the title and access to a plethora of resources that will help you grow your business. Here's what you should know:

## Why Should I Become Certified?

When you become DOBE certified, you gain access to resources, networks and opportunities that aren't typically available to the general public. Through your certification, you can form partnerships with other disability-owned small businesses, gain access to supplier diversity contracts with large-scale corporations, apply for DOBE-exclusive funding opportunities and increase your chances of hiring other individuals with disabilities.

DOBE certifications, such as those obtained through Disability:IN, can also give you access to press opportunities, speaking engagements and business features that will allow you to share your company's mission with a broader audience.

## The Types of Certifications

For individuals with disabilities, there are three types of certifications you should be aware of:

- **Disability-Owned Business Enterprise (DOBE):** A business that is 51% owned, managed and operated by a person or group of individuals with a disability.

- **Veteran Disability-Owned Business Enterprise (V-DOBE):** A business that is 51% owned, managed and operated by a veteran with a disability not incurred during their service.
- **Service-Disabled Veteran Disability-Owned Business Enterprise (SDV-DOBE):** A business that is 51% owned, managed and operated by a veteran who sustained a disability while in service.

There are also certifications available for those identifying with a racial or ethnic minority, as a woman, as a part of the LGBTQ+ community and veterans without a disability. These certifications can be held in tandem with the three different types of DOBE certifications, but may not all be offered through the same certifier.

## Am I Eligible?

While all certification agencies will have slightly different qualifications, most of the main characteristics will be the same across the board. For Disability:IN, for example, business owners must meet the following requirements to apply:

- The business owner must identify with having a physical and/or mental disability that significantly impacts their day-to-day life.
- The business owner must own and manage at least 51% of their business, being able to prove so through verifiable documentation.
- The business owner is able to submit all required documentation as requested by the certification agency.

Additional eligibility factors will be required for Veteran-Owned and Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Businesses, including your veteran status and the disability you sustained.

## What Do I Need?

Again, the exact materials needed for certification will depend on the type of certification you decide to pursue. However, some of the most common materials requested include:

- Proof of U.S. citizenship or permanent resident status
- Government-issued ID
- Documentation of disability status
- Business operating license
- Resume of the business owner
- Business licenses and permits
- Articles of organization
- Recent payroll documentation

Depending on your business type (S-Corporation, LLC, Partnership, Sole Proprietor, etc.), you may also need to provide additional documentation that isn't required for every business type. If you are already certified and are looking to add another certification to your business, you may also need to provide your certification documents.

For those seeking Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) certification, you must provide your Department of Defense Form 214 and Disability Ratings Letter from the VA.

## Where Can I Learn More?

Visit [disabilityin.org](http://disabilityin.org) for more information about certification and how to submit your materials.

Sources: Disability:IN, Coupa Suppliers, Cal eProcure







# Anyone Can Do It: Unger and Lehmann's "Ripple Effect"

By Sydney Severn



COURTESY OF SHAYNA UNGER & SCOTT LEHMANN

After a rather dangerous year in the peaks and plummets of the tallest mountain on the planet, Deaf Maryland locals Shayna Unger and Scott Lehmann summited Mount Everest on May 22nd of this year.

After the Nepali Supreme Court overturned its (albeit, ableist) ban on disabled people climbing Everest—claiming it would create more work for Sherpa guides on the mountain to accommodate people with disabilities—the couple made history as the first Deaf Americans to do so (the third and fourth on record). Unger became the first woman. “This has ignited [our] passion for making the outdoors more accessi-

ble to the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community,” the duo commented on their website.

Lehmann began to pursue his love for climbing in 2012, after taking a cross-country trip post-graduation, and attempted to summit Mt. Rainier. Due to a lack of accessible resources, Lehmann was met with significant communication barriers, limited Deaf and hard-of-hearing representation and restricted access to mountaineering education and opportunities in his attempt to scale Rainier. He was, thus, unable to complete the climb.

He signed up for a climbing course but was responsible for hiring and funding an interpreter, additionally needing to do so for every expedition he would take. In defiance of the unjust obligation, Lehmann tried teaching himself through YouTube videos, but, yet again, encountered an inaccessible language barrier. As a successful last resort, he learned to climb through trial and error, observing other climbers and asking questions as best he could. “I’d often show up on the mountain and ask anyone who would answer my questions [by writing them down on notepads],” Lehmann told *People*.

He then taught Unger, his girlfriend, revealing, “I wanted to save her the embarrassment of having to ask random strangers on the mountain...it was really amazing how quickly she learned because she had direct access to the information from me.”

They shortly summited Mt. Kilimanjaro in 2015, working up to Mt. Denali in 2021. “The day after we got off Denali, we looked at each other and said, ‘let’s go for it’ [‘it’ being Everest].”

The team wrote on social media, “Statistically...one in eight Americans are either Deaf or hard-of-hearing, yet there has been only one Deaf person who has summited Everest. It makes us wonder if this space has ever been accessible for people like us. When will the world be open to our way of communicating and see it as equal? We say the time is now.”

Soon enough, Unger and Lehmann met with a few Sherpa guides and developed a functional communication system, bridging the gap between American Sign Language and hand signals. After about three weeks of working together, plus funding and sponsorship, their climbing party was good to go. They arrived at Everest Base Camp on May 2nd, briefly waiting for safer weather conditions to permit their ascent.

“There’s a lot of different barriers we had to go through to get to Everest,” Unger told *CNN*. “So, when we reached the top, we felt like we overcame the odds...we were really proud of ourselves.”

On their way up they met and befriended Muhammad Hawari Hashim, only the second Deaf person to reach the top, who would summit many days prior. Unfortunately, he hasn’t been seen since.

Lehmann states, “It hasn’t been an easy journey because there are





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“Statistically...one in eight Americans are either Deaf or hard-of-hearing, yet there has been only one Deaf person who has summited Everest. It makes us wonder if this space has ever been accessible for people like us. When will the world be open to our way of communicating and see it as equal? We say the time is now.”

no footsteps for us to follow, so we’re kind of trailing and are creating new paths.”

And, they did. Through the wind, snow, below-freezing conditions and unreliable hours of darkness, Unger and Lehmann made it to the top.

Their accomplishment pushes them more than halfway to their mountaineering goal: completing the Seven Summits (to climb the highest mountains on each continent). They will be the first Deaf climbers to do so, and they explore this group objective in their online project, *Seeing Beyond: Seven Summits*.

Having already achieved Kilimanjaro, Denali, Aconcagua and now Everest, Unger and Lehmann have yet to summit Elbrus, Vinson and Puncak Jaya. “With the right attitude and the right adjustments, [the outdoors] is available for Deaf and hard-of-hearing people,” Lehmann says to *CNN*. “It’s available for people with disabilities.”

Unger and Lehmann now visit Deaf schools across the country to give presentations about their journeys and experiences, also giving glimpses of their gear. “We just notice how much the kids are so excited and inspired, but they’re also like, you know, awestruck because they’ve never seen what we’re doing in Deaf spaces,” Unger said. “We want this to have a ripple effect.”

The couple opens the discussion that just because you have not seen something doesn’t mean it does not or cannot exist.

Though they are not spokespeople for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing or disabled communities as a whole, the climbing team admits to noticing a shift in the nondisabled population, being more accommodating and willing to work with them. They advocate for diversity and normalize it, connecting the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community with their climbing adventures to prove it’s open to *everyone*. Just as destigmatizing disability is the answer; advocating for accessibility is too.

Lehmann says, “It’s not just about reaching the summit...it’s the whole experience, sharing what we’ve learned with our community,” highlighting the normalcy of their accomplishment and that anyone can do it.

Unger alludes to their next climb in an interview: “We’re still processing Everest. But for sure, next will be one of the three Seven Summits. Which one, we’re not sure...”

Sources: Frederick News Post, People, CNN, Gear Junkie





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# The Summer Special Olympics are Back!

By Natalie Rodgers

After some years away due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the summer Special Olympics are back in full swing. Much like the World Olympics, the Special Olympics bring together thousands of athletes from around the world to compete in more than 30 different sporting competitions over the course of several days. But the Special Olympics are more than just a series of competitions; it's an event where people with intellectual differences and disabilities can show off their talents, connect with friends and promote a healthy lifestyle.

## How It Started

In the 1960s, Eunice Kennedy Shriver, the sister of former President John F. Kennedy, wrote an article in which she revealed that their sister, Rosemary, was born with intellectual disabilities. At the time, there were numerous conceptions of what someone with intellectual differences could and couldn't do, but Eunice and Rosemary continuously advocated for the abilities and fulfilling lives that a person with intellectual differences could have. Eunice went on to form Camp Shriver, a summer day camp for people with disabilities where they were given the opportunity to participate in sports that they weren't offered within their communities.

At the same time, Dr. Frank Hayden, a physical education professor, had recently published a paper in which he described the tremendous benefits that physical activity had for people with disabilities that went beyond the benefits of exercise. Together, the two would go on to form the Special Olympics and the biannual worldwide sporting competition.

Today, the Special Olympics are more than just a single sporting competition. With several local chapters around the world, the Special Olympics now provide trainings and sporting competitions to over five million athletes in 172 countries, with approximately 100,000 events being held each year through their local, regional and national chapters.



MARVIN IBO GÜNGÖR - SPECIAL OLYMPICS WORLD GAMES BERLIN 2023/GETTY IMAGES

Team Mauritius celebrates their gold medal after the 3x3 basketball competition on day nine of the Special Olympics World Games Berlin 2023 on June 25, 2023 in Berlin, Germany.



TILO WIEDENSOHLER - SPECIAL OLYMPICS WORLD GAMES BERLIN 2023/GETTY IMAGES

Loretta Claiborne of Special Olympics USA competes during day eight of the Special Olympics World Games Berlin 2023 on June 24, 2023 in Germany.



## This Year's Games

This year, the competition was held in Berlin, Germany, where it hosted 6,500 athletes, 18,000 volunteers and an estimated 100,000 audience members. It marked the first time in years that the summer games were held, as the pandemic had paused the gathering.

This year's competition took place over the

course of nine days and included 26 sporting events in basketball, gymnastics, handball, weight lifting, swimming, track and field, Judo, tennis and many others.

Like the World Olympics and Paralympics, the event was kicked off with an opening ceremony and came to an end with a closing ceremony. These events consisted of a torch light-

ing, the parade of athletes, celebrity guests and ambassadors, musical performances and a speech from Tim Shriver, the head of the Special Olympics and son of Eunice Kennedy Shriver.

The athletes then spent the next several days in competitions taking place in various stadiums and arenas in Berlin, Germany.

But unlike the other two global sporting competitions, the Special Olympics doesn't include a medal table to emphasize friendly matches and camaraderie over competitive pressure. However, gold, silver and bronze medals are still awarded for first through third place and ribbons are given out to the other placing competitors.

There were many notable highlights from the nearly week-and-a-half-long competition that stood out to fans and participants alike, including:

- Tim Shriver's welcome to the Special Olympics Games with an unexpected hug from athlete Jafar Khaddour.
- The launch of the 3x3 basketball competition, which was won by the all-women's team from Mauritius.
- Loretta Claiborne's gold medal win in the tennis women's singles. Claiborne, who has been competing in the games for over 40 years, has also medaled in several other sports over the years, such as bowling, figure skating and running.
- The establishment of inclusion projects such as the Host Town Project that will provide inclusive sporting opportunities for those living in Germany with intellectual disabilities.

The nine days then ended with a closing ceremony where the games were celebrated and Tim Shriver advocated for a more inclusive special education system on a global scale.

Regardless of the wins or medals, the most notable event of the Special Olympics was the camaraderie, teamwork and the continuing proof that people with intellectual disabilities can do anything that other people can do.

"We've been away from each other for too long," Tim Shriver said during the summer Special Olympics opening ceremony. "You know what it's like to be isolated and to be told don't come out. You are the experts of turning every form of pain and trauma into triumph. Your smiles are shining as bright as the stars tonight. I couldn't be more proud of all of you. To the world, I challenge you, if you are searching for a reason to believe, come to Berlin and see how we overcome."



ALEXANDER HASSENSTEIN/GETTY IMAGES

The Special Olympics Chairman, Tim Shriver celebrates with a Syrian athlete during the opening ceremony of the Special Olympics World Games Berlin 2023 at Olympiastadion on June 17, 2023 in Germany.



The delegation of Germany arrives during the opening ceremony of the Special Olympics World Games in Berlin on June 17, 2023. The Special Olympics are the world's largest sports movement for people with intellectual disabilities.

JOHN MACDOUGALL/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

# The First-Ever Television Channel for Business Owners with Disabilities

With a limited number of resources to choose from, finding the right resources for small business owners with disabilities can be difficult. But thanks to a new television channel, accessing the information you need may have become a whole lot easier.

In a partnership with National Disability Institute (NDI) and Boston Media, LLC, the two companies have launched *Disability Owned*, a free nationwide business TV channel on Roku's streaming platform targeted to U.S. business owners and entrepreneurs with disabilities. Through live programming and archived video content, the channel will provide business information, news and resources for aspiring entrepreneurs and the nearly two million business owners in the U.S. with disabilities.

**"Disability Owned is the first national streaming business channel for people with disabilities and will be distributed to more than 300 million U.S. households."**

— Boston Media's CEO  
Kelvin Boston

NDI led the launch of this program as a part of their nearly 20-year mission of championing economic empowerment, financial education, asset development and financial stability for all persons with disabilities, bettering the financial futures of people with disabilities and their families.

"National Disability Institute is pleased to partner with Boston Media on this first of its kind endeavor," said Thomas Foley, NDI executive director. "The *Disability Owned*



streaming channel is an innovative outreach tool that provides practical business information, resources and guidance to entrepreneurs and small business owners with disabilities. This sector saw tremendous growth and expansion during the pandemic and shows no sign of lessening."

*Disability Owned* features original TV shows, curated films, webinars, podcasts and profiles on disability-owned businesses and their founders.

Programs cover everything from business management to educational videos—all of which are created from various nonprofit, public and corporate media partners. At the time of writing, there are currently 11 programs on the channel, which can be accessed at any time on the channel's website. Besides NDI's own curated content, including recorded panels from their national conference, organizations such as the Able Account, 2-Gether International and the Small Business Administration all have content featured on *Disability Owned*.

In addition to being a unique resource, Boston Media's CEO Kelvin Boston, who works to stream content surrounding financial media and digital wellness, announced that *Disability Owned* is the first television channel of its kind to exist.

"*Disability Owned* is the first national streaming business channel for people with

disabilities and will be distributed to more than 300 million U.S. households," he said.

The channel is free to watch any time on the Roku streaming platform and the *Disability Owned* website. It will also be available to watch for free in the near future on Apple TV and the Amazon Fire TV streaming platform, along with iOS and Android mobile devices. *Disability Owned* additionally provides closed captioning on all of their video content. Online closed-captioned videos will require the use of a Chrome browser to be best accessed.

To begin accessing their videos, visit [disabilityowned.com/home](http://disabilityowned.com/home) for more information.

Sources: National Disability Institute, Disability Owned







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# Canes from Clay: How This Potter is Creating a More Accessible World



COURTESY OF SMART GUIDER INC.

Shortly after graduating high school, Kelvin Crosby began to lose his peripheral vision as a result of Usher Syndrome Type II, a condition that affects the vision and hearing. Soon, Crosby found himself at a crossroads between choosing a career path and beginning his healing process, which eventually led him to pottery, entrepreneurship and a platform that would help him reach others in a whole new light.

*DIVERSEability Magazine (DM)* took the time to sit down with Crosby to discuss his journey as a deafblind artist and entrepreneur.

**DM: How did the idea to become a business owner and start Smart Guider Inc. begin?**

**Kelvin Crosby (KC):** After college, I found myself in a job where I was helping blind individuals get employment. It was great but the problem was that a lot of these individuals wouldn't have the proper training and skillset to do their work and they would be let go. It was really frustrating for me. I decided that I wanted to solve this problem. I found a nonprofit to work with me and I built an advanced adaptive technology training program to help visually impaired people get employed and I did that process for about two years. Within a year of me starting that program, I gave birth to Smart Guider Inc.

**DM: There are a lot of different canes out there on the market. What made you want to create the See Me Cane and what sets it apart from the rest?**

**KC:** After I started my business, a friend of mine was hit by a car pretty severely. She blew out her ACL, had several broken bones and lost her job. She was able to recover, but she hasn't been the same since. That really lit a fire in me and I said, "Hey, let's make a cane that lights up and makes it easier to be seen, especially for people walking at night." That's how it became what it is today and it has really become the product that's helped visually impaired people have that freedom and independence to continue solving prob-





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lems. That's what I've done my whole career—I see a problem, I go solve it, I figure out how to do it and make it happen.

The number one thing that separates the See Me Cane from the market is that it's the first fully lit blind cane. Any other cane out there doesn't fully light up. One third of blind people have been hit, or had a near miss, with EVs or hybrids, and because of this, I really wanted to make it possible for every visually impaired person to have access to something that would make it safer for them to walk around. It's not a 100% solution to fixing the problem, but I would say it significantly helps.

**DM: What initially sparked your interest in pottery? How did you become known as the DeafBlind Potter?**

**KC:** Initially, I began doing pottery when I was 19 at the Helen Keller National Center as a way to deal with the pain of losing my vision. So, I got on the pottery wheel and dealt with my pain, I started taking classes and pursued it more in college. People were really impressed with how I was able to throw my clay and I made my first brand, Blind Kelvin Pottery, right before I was working on the See Me Cane.

In March of 2020, I lost all of my funding for me to run my business and I was essentially on my own. A few months later, in June, I lost all ability to engineer my products on my own because I was having some clarity issues in my right eye and could really only see shapes and colors on my computer screen. Between losing my funding and losing my vision, I had to make some hard decisions and find other sources of income.

In December of 2020, my friend had me try pottery in the ceramic shaft that she had built. I really needed to find a way to provide for my family and an outlet to grieve my vision loss and heal from that experience. I began throwing clay once a month and my friend's older sister began taking videos of me on the pottery wheel and posting them to TikTok.

The video blew up and we went from zero followers to over 20,000 in 10 hours. In just a few days, our first popular video had over 1.4 million views and the follower count just kept skyrocketing. Little did we know that by gaining this following, we were building a business selling pottery and telling my story. I became known as the DeafBlind Potter and I started getting custom pottery orders, which brought in the income for me to hire an



COURTESY OF SMART GUIDER INC.

engineer to develop the See Me Cane. I had kind of lost hope and pottery really helped me move my development forward and get us to where we are today.

**DM: Tell us how you felt when you realized your pottery was the key to funding the See Me Cane.**

**KC:** That's a very good question, I guess I haven't really thought about that. For me, it didn't really hit me until about a year ago. When I was able to start paying my engineer, Angela, and say, "Here, I'm able to pay your bills, here's your check," from the money I made from pottery, that was something pretty powerful.

The journey hasn't been easy and being able to now have the opportunity to have platforms to share with people so they can empower themselves is something really, really incredible and I get excited about it. Sometimes it brings me to tears, sometimes it makes me laugh and sometimes it just makes me really humble. I couldn't do it on my own without

my team and my faith.

**DM: In going through this experience, what's the one piece of advice you'd give to someone who wants to start their own business?**

**KC:** Working hard is the key to having a successful business, so you really have to be willing to work hard. Being an entrepreneur and a business owner, you're going to make mistakes and it's okay to make mistakes, but make sure you have a team around you to support you and keep you accountable. My team has really helped me to make good business decisions and grow my businesses in a healthy way. If you don't have that accountability, your business will crash.

For more information on the See Me Cane, visit [seemecane.com](http://seemecane.com), and to learn more about Crosby, his pottery and to view his pieces for sale, visit the [deafblindpotter.com](http://deafblindpotter.com).





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For more information about The **CHAMPIONS** Initiative, please visit [AmFam.com/SupplierDiversity](https://AmFam.com/SupplierDiversity)

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# Questions About Supplier Diversity? We Have Answers



You may have heard the term ‘supplier diversity’ and the benefits it can bring to your small business and corporation alike. If you’re interested in growing your business, especially as a disability-owned business owner, here is what you should know:

## What is supplier diversity?

Supplier diversity refers to the use of minority-owned businesses as suppliers. A supplier diversity program is a proactive business program which encourages such use within an organization’s supply chain. Supplier diversity most often refers to the partnership between larger scale businesses and businesses owned by underrepresented racial minority-, women-owned, veteran-owned, disability-owned and LGBTQ+ owned businesses.

## How does this partnership benefit the supplier?

As a small business owner, teaming up with







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a larger scale business not only guarantees a dependable client, but gives you access to the experiences and insights of a corporate company. A supplier diversity partnership can provide networking and mentorship opportunities, access to a wider clientele and even increases your opportunities to bid and receive larger business contracts. In short, suppliers are able to increase their knowledge, outreach and funds while in a supplier diversity partnership.

### **How does this partnership benefit the supplied?**

Companies who put diversity and inclusion at the forefront of their plans have proven to be more successful than those that don't. Supporting a diverse workplace not only increases morale, but allows for a wider flow of ideas and access to a larger and more diverse client base. In turn, these factors often increase a company's revenue.

Inviting a supplier team to your business will support your company's diversity initiatives, widen your business lens and increase opportunities for new products and further audience reach. This will in turn bring in more revenue for the supplied business. Utilizing small businesses can also foster new jobs and a higher tax revenue.

### **How can I become a diverse supplier?**

The best way to enter a supplier diversity partnership as a supplier is through a certification agency. You can be officially certified as a minority business owner and once you are given the official status, you will gain access to partnership opportunities for your business. Certifications can also help grow your business by providing scholarship and funding opportunities, media coverage, mentorship and networking opportunities, educational resources and more.

### **Do I need to become certified to be a diverse supplier?**

Not necessarily, however most companies require or even prefer to work with small businesses that have been officially certified through a third-party agency, such as the National Minority Supplier Diversity Council (NMSDC), Disability:IN, the Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC) or other applicable organizations.

This certification announces to potential partners that your business has been vetted



and deemed legitimate and reliable by a trusted professional certifying agency.

### **How do I become certified?**

Every organization will have different qualifications for certification, but many of them will have some of the same requirements. For example, Disability:IN, which works to certify disability-owned businesses, requires the following:

- Documentation supporting at least a 51% ownership and management of a business by a person or group with a disability.
- Proof of citizenship or permanent resident status.
- Disability status documentation.

- Your business license or permit.
- Tax forms and return documents.
- Resume of business owners.
- A history of your business and business plan.

Supplier diversity partnerships not only encourage diversity in the business world, but support for small businesses, a boost in the economy and extended business opportunities for everyone involved. Whether you're a big corporation or a small business, a supplier diversity partnership may be the perfect solution to help your business thrive.

Sources: Disability:IN, Wikipedia, Merritt Business Solutions





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# Need to Save Money to Start a Business? Here's the Best Approach



**T**rying to save money to start a business? You're in good company, both present and past. Studies show the majority of small businesses are funded by the founder's savings. And you don't need a ton, relatively speaking, of money. At least one study found that one out of three small businesses get launched with less than \$5,000 in startup funds.

But if you're currently on the downside of this advantage, and struggling to make ends meet, saving \$5,000 can seem insurmountable. That's why many people obsess over the rate of return on their investments: If you're trying to save \$5,000 to start your business, the greater the rate of return, the faster you reach your goal.

But here's the thing: When you're trying to save money, your rate of investment return is important—but your rate of savings is *everything*.

Here's an example. Say you make \$40,000 a year and tuck away 3% of your salary. At the end of the first year, you'll have saved \$1,200. If you earn a 5% return on that money, a year later you'll have \$1,260. If you have a 10% return, you'll have \$1,320.

But if you increase the rate at which you

save by 1%, and tuck away 4% of your salary, at the end of the first year you would have \$1,600—even if you don't generate any return at all.

## Warren Buffett's Secret

As of this writing, Warren Buffett is worth \$114 billion. Clearly, he knows a thing or two about achieving an incredible rate of return. What's more instructive, though, is the timeline:

- By age 30, he had amassed a net worth of \$1 million. (In today's dollars, approximately \$10 million.) That's a lot of money, but nothing compared with \$114 billion.
- By age 50, Buffett was worth \$300 million. Even more impressive, but still \$113.7 billion less than he's currently worth.
- By age 65, Buffett was worth \$3 billion. He was clearly rolling, but that's still \$111 billion less than he's worth today.

Buffett's secret? The financial advantages of a long life, a high rate of return and, as he wrote in his 1965 Buffett Partnership letter, "a combination of both" (especially recommended by this author).

Where building savings is concerned, rate of return certainly matters, but its effect doesn't really snowball until you've amassed a considerable sum. Early on, how much you save matters a lot more than how much you earn on your savings.

So, how can you increase your rate of savings? Like most things in life, the answer is simple in concept, albeit difficult in execution.

## Start Spending Less

I've been there: When your budget is tight, even finding an extra percent in savings is tough.

But, unlike investment returns, you have significantly greater control over your rate of savings. You can decide to eat out a little less. You can join the cable cord-cutters. You can switch to a cheaper cell plan. Shop for cheaper insurance. (A few years ago, we bundled our auto, homeowners and rental property insurance under one provider and saved a total of over \$2,000 per year. We should have done that years before.)

You can't control how much you earn from your investments.

But you *can* control how much you spend. Think about your long-term goal—in this



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case, to pull together enough money to start your business—to remind yourself no “sacrifice” is truly a sacrifice if it helps get you where you want to be.

## Make More

And, although possibly to a lesser extent, you can also control how much you earn.

Again, say you make \$40,000 a year and save 3% of your salary, or \$1,200. Start a side hustle that generates \$200 per month after expenses and taxes and if you save the proceeds, you’ll have saved \$3,600 after one year (\$1,200 plus \$2,400).

Again: The rate of savings matters a lot more than rate of investment return.

Which proves, in this case, that your time is much better spent finding ways to save and/or make more money than it is trying to eke out a marginally better rate of investment return.

Granted, it might take a few years to pull together the capital you need to start your business, but that’s OK, since the same skills required to bootstrap your way to sufficient startup capital will apply to bootstrapping



your startup through its first years of existence.

Because nearly every successful entrepreneur is really, really good at constantly finding ways to cut costs and increase revenue.

*Jeff Haden is a keynote speaker, ghostwriter, LinkedIn Top Voice, contributing editor to Inc. and the author of The Motivation Myth: How High Achievers Really Set Themselves Up to Win.*

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# The Hiring Guide for Small Business Owners

**H**iring employees is more than just a job ad and some interview questions. You'll want to make sure that your future employees are being properly cared for according to federal and state laws. Here's what you need to know:

## Hire and pay employees

Before finding the right person for the job, you'll need to create a plan for paying employees. Follow these steps to set up payroll:

- Get an Employer Identification Number (EIN)
- Find out whether you need state or local tax IDs
- Decide if you want an independent contractor or an employee
- Ensure new employees return a completed W-4 form
- Schedule pay periods to coordinate tax withholding for IRS
- Create a compensation plan for holiday, vacation and leave
- Choose an in-house or external service for administering payroll
- Decide who will manage your payroll system
- Know which records must stay on file and for how long
- Report payroll taxes as needed on a quarterly and annual basis

The IRS maintains the employer's tax guide, which provides guidance on all federal tax filing requirements that could apply to your small business. Check with your state tax agency for employer filing stipulations.

## File taxes with employees or independent contractors

Distinguishing between employees and independent contractors can impact your bottom line, or your total revenue once expenses have been deducted. Your bottom line ultimately impacts how you withhold taxes and helps you stay legally compliant during tax season. Learn the differences before hiring your first employee.

An independent contractor operates under a separate business name from your company and invoices for the work they've completed. Independent contractors can sometimes qualify as employees in a legal sense. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission guide

breaks things down so you can make a more informed decision.

If your contractor is discovered to meet the legal definition of employee, you may need to pay back taxes and penalties, provide benefits and reimburse wages stipulated under the Fair Labor Standards Act.

## Plan to offer employee benefits

Health care and other benefits play a significant role in hiring and retaining employees. Some employee benefits are required by law, but others are optional. Required employee benefits include:

- Social Security taxes: Employers must pay Social Security taxes at the same rate as their employees.
- Workers' Compensation: Required through a commercial carrier, self-insured basis or state workers' compensation program.
- Disability Insurance: Disability pay is required in California, Hawaii, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island and Puerto Rico.
- Leave benefits: Most leave benefits are optional outside those stipulated in the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).
- Unemployment insurance: Varies by state, and you may need to register with your state workforce agency.

## Optional employee benefits

Your small businesses can offer a complete range of optional benefits to help attract and retain employees. Even if a benefit you offer is optional, it might still have to comply with certain laws if you choose to offer it.

Businesses that offer group health plans must comply with federal laws. You can read more about those laws in the Department of Labor's advisory guide.

Employees can expand coverage through the Affordable Care Act and some may qualify for benefits via the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA). Businesses must extend the option of COBRA benefits to employees who are terminated or laid off. For more information and resources to help small businesses make decisions about health insurance coverage, visit [HealthCare.gov](https://www.healthcare.gov).



Retirement plans are a very popular employee benefit. Consider offering an employer-sponsored plan like a 401(k) or a pension plan. The federal government offers a wide range of resources to aid small business owners in choosing their retirement plan and pension.

## Employee incentive programs

Employee incentive programs can boost morale and create more draw for open positions. Common incentives include stock options, flex time, wellness programs, corporate memberships and company events.

If your budget allows, you may want to consider investing in benefits administration software to make your accounting process easier and more efficient. Detailing these benefits in the employee handbook helps your staff make decisions, and they can use it as a reference for workplace requirements.

## Follow federal and state labor laws

Protect workers' rights and your business by adhering to labor laws, which means you must ensure that business practices align with industry regulations.

This includes learning applicable laws for hiring veterans, foreign workers, household employees, child labor and people with disabilities, among others groups. You must also comply when terminating an employee, laying off workers or downsizing the company.

Consult the Department of Labor's federal and state law resources for more information.

Source: Small Business Administration



# WE GET DIVERSITY MATTERS.

**CDW is committed to supporting disabled-owned businesses.**

Ours is a commitment that reaches well beyond our coworkers, the customers we serve and the communities we live in. Partnering strategically with qualified businesses enables us to keep providing the industry's best experience, while contributing to economic growth in diverse communities nationwide.

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**Learn more about our commitment to diversity at  
[CDW.com/SupplierDiversity](https://www.cdw.com/SupplierDiversity)**



# Funding Ideas for Your Small Business

It costs money to start a business. Funding your business is one of the first—and most important—financial choices most business owners make. How you choose to fund your business could affect how you structure and run your business.

## Become certified

When you become a certified DOBE (Disability-Owned Business Enterprise), you will gain access to bid on contracts and apply for funding opportunities that would not otherwise be available to you. While these funds are not guaranteed, the chances of receiving these funds increases with certification. Becoming a certified business also gives you access to networking opportunities and resources that can help you grow your business.

You can also become certified as several kinds of businesses at once (woman-owned, LGBTQ+ owned, minority-owned), providing even more opportunities for funding and business growth.

## Fund your business yourself

Otherwise known as bootstrapping, self-funding lets you leverage your own financial resources to support your business. Self-funding can come in the form of turning to family and friends for capital, using your savings accounts or even tapping into your 401(k).

With self-funding, you retain complete control over the business, but you also take on all the risk yourself. Be careful not to spend more than you can afford, and be especially careful if you choose to tap into retirement accounts early. You might face expensive fees or penalties, or damage your ability to retire on time—so you should check with your plan's administrator and a personal financial advisor first.

## Get venture capital from investors

Investors can give you funding to start your business in the form of venture capital investments. Venture capital is normally offered in exchange for an ownership share and active role in the company.

Venture capital differs from traditional financing in a number of important ways. Venture capital typically:

- Focuses on high-growth companies.
- Invests capital in return for equity, rather than debt (it's not a loan).
- Takes higher risks in exchange for potential higher returns.
- Has a longer investment horizon than traditional financing.

Almost all venture capitalists will, at a minimum, want a seat on the board of directors. So be prepared to give up some portion of control and/or ownership of your company in exchange for funding.

## Use crowdfunding to fund your business

Crowdfunding raises funds for a business from a large number of people, called crowdfunders. Crowdfunders aren't technically investors, because they don't receive a share of ownership in the business and don't expect a financial return on their money.

Instead, crowdfunders expect to get a "gift" from your company as thanks for their contribution. Often, that gift is the product you plan to sell or other special perks, like meeting the business owner or getting their name in the credits. This makes crowdfunding a popular option for people who want to produce creative works (like a documentary) or a physical product (like a high-tech cooler).

Crowdfunding is also popular because it's very low risk for business owners. Not only do you get to retain full control of your company, but if your plan fails, you're typically under no obligation to repay your crowdfunders. Every crowdfunding platform is different, so make sure to read the fine print and understand your full financial and legal obligations.

## Get a small business loan

If you want to retain complete control of your business, but don't have enough funds to start, consider a small business loan.

To increase your chances of securing a loan, you should have a business plan, expense sheet and financial projections for the

next five years. These tools will give you an idea of how much you'll need to ask for, and will help the bank know they're making a smart choice by giving you a loan.

Once you have your materials ready, contact banks and credit unions to request a loan. You'll want to compare offers to get the best possible terms for your loan.

## Use Lender Match to find lenders who offer SBA-guaranteed loans

If you have trouble getting a traditional business loan, you should look into SBA-guaranteed loans. When a bank thinks your business is too risky to lend money to, the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) can agree to guarantee your loan. That way, the bank has less risk and is more willing to give your business a loan.

## SBA investment programs:

- **Small Business Investment Company (SBIC):** SBICs are privately owned and managed investment funds licensed and regulated by SBA. They use their own capital, plus funds borrowed with an SBA guarantee, to make equity and debt investments in qualifying small businesses.
- **Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program:** This program encourages small businesses to engage in federal research and development that has the potential for commercialization.
- **Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) program:** This program offers funding opportunities in the federal innovation research and development arena. Small businesses who qualify for this program work with nonprofit research institutions in the early and intermediate stages of starting up.

Source: SBA



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# Henry Winkler

## The Happiest Days

By Sarah Mosqueda

**H**enry Winkler is most recognized for his portrayal of Arthur Herbert Fonzone, or “The Fonz” on the popular television series, *Happy Days*. Fonzie is widely regarded as one of the greatest television characters of all time; a leather-jacket-wearing loyal friend and flirt. The character was also portrayed as a high school dropout. The aversion to school was one Winkler was familiar with.

“It really wasn’t called school to me,” Winkler said. “It was called ‘oh, you gotta go to struggle today.’”

It’s difficult to imagine Winkler, a successful actor, producer, director and author, ever struggled with anything. But Winkler’s transparency about his battle with dyslexia, and the efforts he has made to bring awareness to the learning disability, is inspiring enough to make even the Fonz say “whoa.”

### Burning Ambition

Henry Franklin Winkler was born in New York on October 30th, 1945 to Ilse Anna Marie and Harry Irving Winkler. His academic struggles were the result of undiagnosed dyslexia and it created challenges for him throughout his life.

“From the very beginning I couldn’t read, I couldn’t do math,” Winkler said. “If I bought a piece of pizza from a pizzeria on Broadway and I gave them paper money, I had no idea how much change I was supposed to get back nor could I count up the change in my hand. I just had to trust that everybody was being fair.”

Dyslexia is a neuro-cognitive disorder that can make reading challenging due to difficulty identifying speech sounds. Sometimes called a learning disability, dyslexia is hard to identify because the problems it causes are often misdiagnosed as hear-

ing, vision or even intelligence issues. According to the Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity, dyslexia is the most common neuro-cognitive disorder, affecting 20% of the population.

Winkler had a hard time in school, first at P.S. 087 William Sherman in Manhattan, and then at McBurney School, an all-boys college prep school.

There was, however, one place where Winkler felt right at home: the stage. Unfortunately, his academics sometimes stood in the way of his acting.

“I am unbelievably ambitious so I tried out for school plays. Of course, I went to a private school where unless your grades were good enough you couldn’t do extracurricular activities,” said Winkler. “So, I couldn’t do the very thing I loved.”

He pursued acting at the collegiate level and majored in theater at Emerson College in Boston. During his senior year, he auditioned for the Yale School of Drama and was admitted into the MFA program in 1967. After receiving his MFA in 1970, he was among the select few invited to join the Yale Repertory Theatre.

“I went to the Yale Drama School and then I became a member of the Yale Repertory,” Winkler said. “On June 30th, 1970, I got my first paycheck for \$173 for being an actor, and I was now earning money doing my dream.”

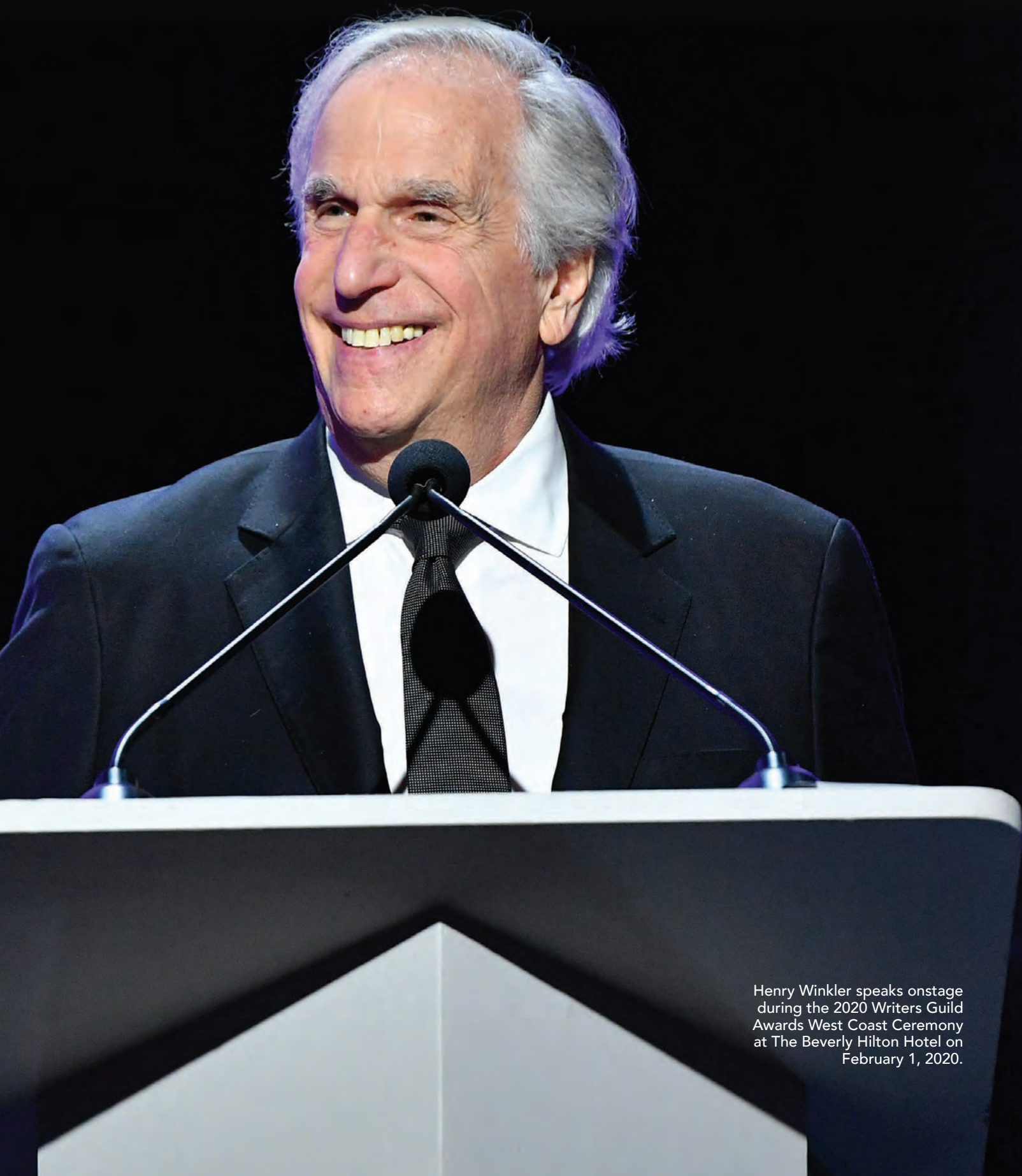
### Happier Days

Winkler charged ahead, appearing in plays on Broadway, but struggled through cold reads.

“I could not read half a page and do anything else at the same time. I stumbled over every word, so auditioning was a very special challenge,” he said. “I memorized all the words I could in the shortest amount of time, and then when I went to audition and I ran out of what I knew, I ad-libbed.”

AMY SUSSMAN/GETTY IMAGES FOR WGAW





Henry Winkler speaks onstage during the 2020 Writers Guild Awards West Coast Ceremony at The Beverly Hilton Hotel on February 1, 2020.

Winkler also used other techniques to cope with his disability. “They would say, ‘hmm, well wait a minute, that’s not what we wrote.’ I would say, ‘yes, but I’m giving you the essence of the character.’ And it worked great.”

In 1973, at the behest of his agent, Winkler set out for Hollywood.

“My agent came out to California in order to start a satellite office and a man named John Kimball was in New York and running her New York office. He said to me, ‘look, you wanna be known to New York? Stay here. You wanna be known to the world? Go to California.’”

Within a week, Winkler was hired for a small role on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. Not long after, he auditioned for a part on a new television show.

“I went to Los Angeles on September 18th, 1973,” recalls Winkler. “Two weeks later, I auditioned at Paramount Studios for a brand new show that turned out to be *Happy Days*.”

Weekly table reads on the *Happy Days* set were a struggle for the 27-year-old actor, but in some ways, Winkler’s dyslexia pushed him to explore other aspects of his craft. He relied on physical comedy and facial expression, rather than lines.

As many will recall, on *Happy Days*, simple acts like snapping his fingers or a swift pound on the jukebox, could elicit laughs. Even his catchphrase, “Ayyyee,” was infused with different inflections, depending on what the scene called for. In short, he was a good actor.

“It kept me light on my feet, I’ll tell you that,” said Winkler. “I had to be aware. I had to listen with laser focus so that I would know what to say, when to say it and how to answer it if I didn’t know what I was supposed to say for sure.”

## ‘I Loved Every Moment’

Winkler worked on *Happy Days* until the show ended in 1984 and he remembers his time on the iconic sitcom fondly. “From the moment I started ‘til the minute we said goodbye, I loved every moment,” he said.

After the show ended, Winkler directed and served as executive producer for the CBS Schoolbreak Special: *All the Kids Do It*, starring his former *Happy Days* co-star, Scott Baio. The special earned a Daytime Emmy for Outstanding Children’s Special in 1985 and was nominated for a Daytime Emmy for Outstanding Directing in Children’s Programming the same year.



MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES



MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES



FOTOS INTERNATIONAL/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

Winkler went on to direct television sitcoms and theatrical releases, like 1988’s *Memories of Me*. When Adam Sandler listed Arthur Fonzarelli among the famous Jewish celebrities and fictional characters in “The Chanukah Song” he performed on *Saturday Night Live* in 1994, Winkler reached out to thank him, and the two began a friendship that goes on to this day.

“Now I will tell you just as an aside, Adam Sandler has a new movie on Netflix called, *You Are So Not Invited to my Bat Mitzvah*. We just watched it last night and I cannot say enough about it,” Winkler said. “It is so human.”

Sandler cast Winkler in 1998 in *The Waterboy* as Coach Klein and in four other subsequent films. Winkler went on to play lawyer Barry Zuckerkorn in *Arrested Development* and worked on the HBO comedy *Barry*

**1.** *Happy Days*’ co-stars Henry Winkler, Tom Bosley and Ron Howard, circa 1981.

**2.** Henry Winkler and Ron Howard as Arthur ‘The Fonz’ Fonzarelli and Richie Cunningham, respectively, in the sitcom *Happy Days*, circa 1980.

**3.** Henry Winkler, as Arthur ‘Fonzie’ Fonzarelli, and Marion Ross as Marion Cunningham, in a scene from the television sitcom *Happy Days*, circa 1975.

**4.** Henry Winkler accepts the award for Best Supporting Actor in a Broadcast Network or Cable Series onstage during the 2nd Annual HCA TV Awards: Broadcast & Cable at The Beverly Hilton on August 13, 2022.

**5.** Max Winkler, Henry Winkler, Stacey Winkler, Zoe Winkler and Jed Weitzman celebrate Henry Winkler’s Pacific Pioneer Broadcasters Lifetime Achievement Award at Sportsmen’s Lodge on January 29, 2016 in Studio City, California.

**6.** (L-R) Actors Henry Winkler, Penny Marshall, Garry Marshall, Cindy Williams and Dick Van Dyke backstage at the 6th Annual TV Land Awards held at Barker Hangar on June 8, 2008 in Santa Monica, California.



# BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR

## IN A BROADCAST NETWORK OR CABLE SERIES, COMEDY



KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES

4



5

TIBRINA HOBSON/GETTY IMAGES  
JEFF KRAVITZ/FILMMAGIC



6



with Bill Hader as acting teacher Gene Cousineau.

“We just finished our run on television and we did four seasons,” Winkler said. “I will tell you that it was one of the greatest experiences because everybody involved was at the top of their game. Allen Berg is a brilliant man and had brilliant vision, and they cast so well; we just had the best time.”

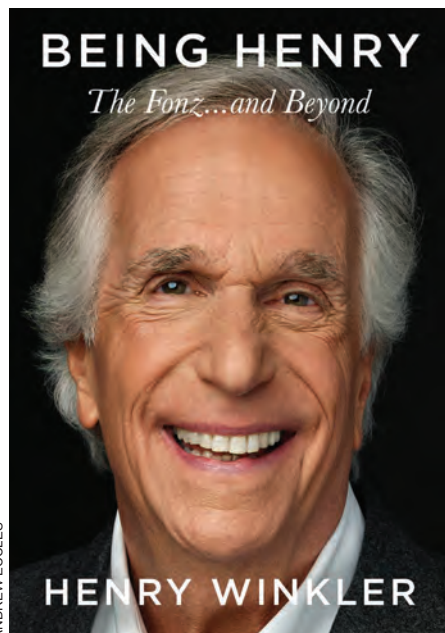
Winkler was awarded a Primetime Emmy in 2018 for his role on *Barry* and also took home two Critics Choice Television Awards for Best Supporting Actor in a Comedy Series in 2019 and 2023.

“You know, it’s a very humbling thing, being nominated four years in a row for the Emmys,” he said.

### From Actor to Author

At 31, Winkler realized his stepson was having the same frustrating experience he had in school.

“My stepson is now in his 50s, but when he was in the third grade, he was having trouble with eye hand coordination. He was



ANDREW ECCLES



RICK KERNIGETTY IMAGES



LILLY LAWRENCE/IREIMAGE

so verbal and so funny and could get along with everybody but he could not write a report long hand to present to the teacher,” Winkler said. “So, we had him tested and everything that they said about him I went, ‘Oh my God that’s me!’ That’s how I found out [that I had dyslexia].”

Winkler still marvels that he’s since added best-selling author to his resume. “It is something I never thought I could be, first of all,

and second of all, never in my wildest dreams did I think I would be doing it,” he said.

Winkler advocates for children with learning disabilities through his *Hank Zipzer: The World’s Greatest Underachiever* children’s book series. The title character is a young boy who is dyslexic and his stories are based on Winkler’s own childhood difficulties with school.

Winkler has also written other children’s

book series, like *Alien Super Star*, a middle school book series centered around a 13-year-old alien who crash lands in Hollywood, California.

“I just got a copy of *Alien Super Star* from France—it now exists in seven or eight languages.”

His latest youth series, *Detective Duck*, debuts in October with Winkler’s 38th children’s book and involves an environmentally-con-





1. Sarah Goldberg and Henry Winkler attend *Barry*: Sneak Peek and Cast Panel during Moontower's Just for Laughs at the State Theatre on April 22, 2022 in Austin, Texas.
2. Henry Winkler at a book signing for his new children's books, *Bookmarks Are People Too* and *A Short Tale About a Long Dog*, at Ron Robinson Fred Segal on April 26, 2014 in West Hollywood, California.
3. Henry Winkler poses with fans during *Barry*'s Gene Cousineau Canter's FYC Giveaway at Canter's Deli on June 10, 2023 in Los Angeles.
4. Actor Henry Winkler and wife Stacey arrive at the Milk + Bookies 6th Annual Story Time Celebration at Skirball Cultural Center on April 19, 2015 in Los Angeles.
5. (L-R) Julia Roberts, Henry Winkler and Jennifer Coolidge at the 28th Annual Critics Choice Awards at Fairmont Century Plaza on January 15, 2023 in Los Angeles.
6. Kim Kardashian and Henry Winkler attend the This Is About Humanity (TIAH) 4th Annual Fundraiser at a private residence on August 27, 2022 in Los Angeles.

scious yellow duck.

"She is a wonderful duck, she dreams about being a detective and she is also ecologically aware; she protects her habitat," said Winkler. "It's very important for young people to start to understand that if we don't take care of our environment then, you know, just hold your nose and say goodbye."

On October 31st, adult fans can look forward to the release of Winkler's latest mem-

oir, *Being Henry: The Fonz...and Beyond*. He recorded the audio of his new book himself, which meant doing something he never looks forward to: reading aloud.

"When I read it on tape—which is the hardest thing in my career, I think, to read this, to record it on Audible—what I heard as I started off was being who I thought I should be," said Winkler. "I'm trying very hard to get to who I am right now."

The iconic actor says it's a journey he is still navigating, but he assures anyone struggling with dyslexia that it is possible to find a path to success.

"When there's a will there's a way," said Winkler. "One road that leads to your enjoyment, leads to your success and then leads to your contentment, and it's up to you to keep exploring until you find your road."



# TOP 10

## Most Accessible Cities in the World

Looking to take a vacation with limited worries about accessibility? In late 2022, a survey was conducted by the Valuable 500 amongst 3,500 tourists with disabilities to determine the most accessible cities worldwide. Respondents rated the accessibility of each city according to the transport links, the proximity of accommodation to cultural attractions, shops and restaurants and the availability of accessibility information. The top 10 most accessible cities in the world, as voted for by disabled travelers who have traveled in them, are as follows:



### Amsterdam, Netherlands

The capital and the most populous city of the Netherlands, Amsterdam is colloquially referred to as the “Venice of the North” for its large number of canals and it is one of the most popular destinations for festivals and nightlife events.

- **Average Temperatures:** 33-71 degrees
- **Public Transportation:** Tramway, metro, ferry, railways
- **Points of Interest:** Koningsdag Festival, The Van Gogh Museum, Anne Frank House, canals



### Las Vegas, Nevada

Known as “The Entertainment Capital of the World,” Las Vegas is an internationally renowned major resort city known primarily for its gambling, shopping, fine dining, entertainment and nightlife. The Las Vegas Valley serves as Nevada’s leading financial, commercial and cultural center.

- **Average Temperatures:** 27-107 degrees
- **Public Transportation:** Rideshare services, RTC transit (buses)
- **Points of Interest:** Casinos and hotels, Las Vegas Strip, Downtown Arts District, The Neon Museum





## New York, New York

New York, often called New York City or NYC, is the most populous city in the United States. New York City is a global cultural, financial, entertainment and media center with a significant influence on commerce, health care and life sciences, research, technology, education, politics, tourism, dining, art, fashion and sports.

- **Average Temperatures:** 26-84 degrees
- **Public Transportation:** Rideshare services, RTC transit (buses), taxis, metro
- **Points of Interest:** Statue of Liberty, Central Park, Broadway, Times Square

## Orlando, Florida

One of the largest metropolitan areas in the United States, Orlando is home to some of the most beloved theme parks in the country. It is one of the most-visited cities in the world primarily due to tourism, major events and convention traffic.

- **Average Temperatures:** 52-91 degrees
- **Public Transportation:** Rideshare services, railways, buses, metro

- **Points of Interest:** Walt Disney World, Universal Studios Florida, Orlando Museum of Art, Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts



## Paris, France

Paris is France's capital and the most populous city, often called "the City of Light." Paris is considered an important center for the arts and sciences, fashion, finance, gastronomy, diplomacy and commerce.

- **Average Temperatures:** 35-78 degrees
- **Public Transportation:** Railways, metro, tramway
- **Points of Interest:** Eiffel Tower, Louvre, Centre Pompidou, Basilica of Sacré-Cœur





### Shanghai, China

Shanghai is one of the four direct-administered municipalities of the People's Republic of China. Originally a fishing and market town, Shanghai is now one of the most populous urban areas in China, with 39,300,000 inhabitants living in the Shanghai metropolitan area.

- **Average Temperatures:** 34-90 degrees
- **Public Transportation:** Metros, buses, ferries, taxis
- **Points of Interest:** The Bund, City of God Temple, The Shanghai Museum, Yu Garden

### London, United Kingdom

The capital of the United Kingdom, London is one of the most popular cities in the world. The city is not only a beloved tourist destination with a strong influence in the arts and entertainment; but it is home to some of the world's top academic universities, diverse populations and excellent transit systems.



- **Average Temperatures:** 40-74 degrees
- **Public Transportation:** London Underground, buses, trams
- **Points of Interest:** The West End, Tower of London, the London Eye, Piccadilly Circus





## Singapore, Singapore

Singapore, officially the Republic of Singapore, is a sovereign island country and city-state in maritime Southeast Asia. Though it is one of the most expensive cities in the world, it is home to some of the longest life expectancies, lowest infant mortality rates and lowest levels of corruption in the world.

- **Average Temperatures:** 76-90 degrees
- **Public Transportation:** Trains, buses, taxis
- **Points of Interest:** The Merlion, Marina Bay, the Esplanade, the Singapore Flyer

## Sydney, Australia

The capital of New South Wales, Sydney is the most populous city in both Australia and Oceania. Despite ranking as one of the most expensive cities, Sydney is known for being one of the most livable and influential places in the world, specializing in finance, manufacturing and tourism.

- **Average Temperatures:** 53-79 degrees
- **Public Transportation:** Trains, buses, trams, ferries, rideshare services
- **Points of Interest:** Sydney Opera House, Sydney Harbour Bridge, Featherdale Wildlife Park, Bondi Beach



## Tokyo, Japan

Originally a fishing village, Tokyo is one of the most prominent cities with one of the largest populations and the second-largest urban economy in the world. Tokyo is an epicenter for all things business, shopping and entertainment.

- **Average Temperatures:** 35-88 degrees
- **Public Transportation:** Trains, subways, monorails, trams, buses
- **Points of Interest:** Takeshita Street, Shinjuku Gyo-en, Tokyo National Museum, Tokyo Disneyland/Tokyo DisneySea

While no city can claim to be fully accessible, it is worth championing those making efforts to cater to the wide-ranging and diverse needs of disabled travelers. With an estimated billion of the world's population living with disability and an aging population, it is increasingly crucial that governments and businesses in the travel sector work towards meeting accessibility needs globally.

Sources: The Valuable 500, Wikipedia, NOAA



# In the News



## Max Park Sets Rubik's Cube World Record

When Max Park was nine years old, he began taking an interest in the Rubik's Cube toy he found lying around his house. Lacking fine motor skills at the time due to his autism, Park's mother used the Rubik's Cube to help fine-tune his motor and social skills with other Rubik's Cube enthusiasts. Now, at 21 years old, not only have Park's motor skills improved, but he holds the Guinness World Record for the fastest 3x3x3 Rubik's Cube time. On June 11th, Park solved a Rubik's Cube in 3.13 seconds, beating out the previous record of 3.47 seconds previously held by China's Yusheng Du. Park adds this world record to the collection of titles he holds within the cubing community, previously beating records for the 4x4x4 cube, 5x5x5 cube, 6x6x6 cube and 7x7x7 cube and is regarded as the world's top "speedcuber."

Sources: NPR News, CNN



JEFF KRAVITZ/FILMMAGIC FOR HBO

## Keivonn Montreal Woodard Makes Emmy's History

Among the cast of *The Last of Us*, one actor stood out among the rest for his incredible performance and for being one of the few deaf characters to be played by a deaf actor in media. Now, this young actor is making history with his Emmy nomination. Ten-year-old Keivonn Montreal Woodard collected an Emmy nomination for "Outstanding Guest Actor in a Drama Series" for his portrayal of Sam Burrell in the television adaptation of the popular video game. This makes Woodard the youngest person ever to be nominated in this category and the first Black deaf actor to receive an Emmy nomination of any kind. In an interview with *Deadline*, he expressed his surprise at the nomination along with some advice for other deaf people wanting to act: "Yes, it was hard with the facial expressions and learning how to [interpret the script for American Sign Language], but I think it's really important to also learn to listen to your production team and to collaborate with them. I got in, and so can you."

Sources: Deadline, People





## Teenage Actor Becomes the First Person with Down Syndrome to Star in a Disney Film

Down syndrome is one of the most underrepresented groups in television and film today, but a recent portrayal of a popular Disney character is working to change this trend. After sending in his audition tape and having a successful meeting with the director, 15-year-old actor Noah Matthews Matofsky was cast in the role of Slightly, the captain of Peter Pan's Lost Boys in Disney's live-action adaptation of *Peter Pan* entitled *Peter Pan and Wendy*. Matofsky's prominence in the role has made him the first actor with Down syndrome to portray a major role in a Disney film. "As captain of the Lost Boys," Matofsky's mother, Kathryn, said of her son's role in the film, "Noah's character Slightly shows that Down syndrome never needs to hold you back... it's not a learning difficulty - it's a learning difference, and we should embrace differences." The film was released in late April and is now available to stream on Disney+.

Source: Inside the Magic



## ReelAbilities Launches Streaming Platform

The ReelAbilities Film Festival has been one of the most popular events for showcasing movies created by, starring and telling the stories of people with disabilities. Now, the festival has announced the launch of [ReelAbilitiesStream.org](https://reelabilitiesstream.org), a new streaming platform that will exclusively showcase the kinds of movies presented at their festivals. The library will feature over 50 films, all of which have premiered at past festivals, and will officially be the largest source of disability-themed films. Co-founder of the ReelAbilities Film Festival, Isaac Zablocki, said of the new streaming service: "Over the past 15 years, our festival has amassed an incredible collection of films that deserve wider recognition. Unfortunately, many of these exceptional works have not been given the attention they deserve... we are proud to establish the most comprehensive platform, amplifying these voices and providing a well-deserved spotlight for these highly demanded films."

Source: The Hollywood Reporter

# In the News



## United Becomes First U.S. Airline to Add Braille to Aircraft Cabin Interiors

The popular airline, United, has become the first U.S. airline to add braille to aircraft interiors, helping millions of travelers with visual disabilities more easily navigate the cabin independently. The airline currently has equipped about a dozen aircraft with braille markings for individual rows and seat numbers as well as inside and outside the lavatories. United expects to outfit its entire mainline fleet with braille by the end of 2026. In addition to adding braille, United is working with the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), the American Council of the Blind (ACB) and other disability advocacy groups to explore the use of other tactile navigational aids throughout the cabin, such as raised letters, numbers and arrows. United has also announced different ways in which they will make their flights more accessible such as a redesign of their app, closed captioning for movie screens, text-to-speech controls, audio-described movies and partnerships to advance disability inclusion.

Source: United Airlines



## Barbie with Down Syndrome

Barbie has once again added a doll to its lineup that will further inclusion for children of all backgrounds. Early this summer, Mattel introduced the first Barbie doll with Down syndrome, created in collaboration with the National Down Syndrome Society. The characteristics of the new doll include a new face and body sculpt to be more illustrative of women with Down syndrome, including a shorter frame, longer torso, almond shape eyes and the single palm line that is common in many people diagnosed with Down syndrome. The doll also wears a dress featuring butterflies and yellow and blue colors, the symbol and colors associated with Down syndrome awareness, and wears pink ankle foot orthotics, which some children with Down syndrome wear to support their feet and ankles. The 2023 Fall Fashionistas dolls, including the Barbie doll with Down syndrome, are available now in limited quantities online and in stores this summer and fall at major retailers.

Source: Mattel, Inc.



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# Finding Success as a Student with a Learning Disability



In a 2021 survey released by the National Center for Educational Statistics, nearly 20% of all college undergraduates had a learning disability. While there are tons of students with learning disabilities who go on to graduate, receive high marks and demonstrate a profound understanding of their degree, there are also many who struggle to keep up with a collegiate setting and face immense pressure to complete seemingly “easy” classroom tasks.

But what many students don’t know is that whether you’re coming to a college campus for the first time or about to finish your degree, there are a plethora of resources available to students on and off campus that can help them in their educational journey. Here’s what you should know:

## What is Considered a Learning Disability?

A learning disability is typically characterized as any condition that affects someone’s ability to understand or use spoken or written

language, do mathematical calculations, coordinate movements and direct attention. The most common learning disabilities are:

- **Dyslexia:** Difficulty in reading, writing and comprehension.
- **Dysgraphia:** Difficulty in converting thoughts into written communication.
- **Dyscalculia:** Difficulty in processing mathematical concepts, numbers and ideas.
- **Auditory Processing Disorder (APD):** Difficulty processing and differentiating sounds.
- **Language Processing Disorder:** A subset of APD that specifically focuses on spoken language.
- **Nonverbal Learning Disabilities:** Difficulty in decoding nonverbal behavior.
- **Visual Perceptual/Visual Motor Deficit:** Difficulty with hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills.

While not considered a learning disability by definition, ADHD can also affect a per-

son’s ability to pay attention, stay on task, manage assignments and other crucial tasks in the classroom. In fact, 30-50% of children diagnosed with ADHD often have an accompanying learning disability.

## On-Campus Resources

One of the greatest resources you can utilize while you’re in college is the disability services office. Required for every college campus through the ADA, the disability services office provides accommodations, advocacy, information and networking opportunities for students with disabilities. While these offices are often associated with students who are deaf or hard of hearing, have visual impairments or use a wheelchair, this office also caters to students with invisible disabilities like a learning disability.

Once you have registered with your campus’ office, you can obtain access to accommodations such as:

- Notetakers.
- Extra time and extended due dates for assignments and tests.
- Reduced course loads which allow for students to maintain a full-time status while taking on a smaller course load.
- Hybrid schedules that allow students to obtain their education from home rather than the distracting or overstimulating environment of a school campus.
- Assistive software and technology, such as word-prediction apps, to help dyslexic students; time blocking software for students with ADHD; and AAC software that speaks for nonverbal students.

Students with learning disabilities are also encouraged to reach out to their professors every time they begin a new class to inform them of their diagnosis. This creates a gateway for students to speak directly to their professors about due dates, test times and what they may need in a classroom to thrive.

## Apps and Extensions

Besides what you can find on your campus, some students have found help through a number of apps and programs that have aided them in an academic setting. Some of these





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include:

- **Grammarly:** A typing assistant that helps clean up, correct and reformat essays and other written documents.
- **Dyslexia Toolbox:** An extension that formats text into OpenDyslexic, a font that's easier for people with dyslexia to read.
- **Web Captioner:** A real-time audio captioning app for those with auditory processing disorders.
- **Stay Focused:** An extension for Google Chrome that blocks distracting websites and breaks tasks into smaller sections to improve focus.

### Websites and Organizations

There are specific online resources and organizations dedicated to keeping you informed and protected when it comes to your learning disability. These sources will not only introduce you to more tips and technology that will help you on your educational journey, but they can also provide insight on what to do in cases of discrimination and help in connecting with other students with learning disabilities. They include:



- **National Center for Learning Disabilities:** Advocacy and educational resources for individuals with learning disabilities.
- **LD OnLine:** Articles, personal stories and support resources for all learning disabilities and ADHD.
- **Genius Within:** Assessments and workshops for students so they can fully

understand their educational abilities.

- **The Neurodiversity Resource Library:** Provides information for students with learning disabilities who are about to enter the workforce.

Sources: Best Colleges, Walden University, Learning Disabilities Association of America



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# Wright-Gallo Becomes Head of Special Education Services

Just ahead of the new school year, the Senate confirmed Glenna Wright-Gallo as the new head of the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) at the U.S. Department of Education.

"I am thrilled that Glenna Wright-Gallo, a lifelong educator and accomplished special education leader, has been successfully confirmed as the Department of Education's new assistant secretary for special education and rehabilitative services," Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona said. "Her commitment to meeting the needs of the special education community and strong track record of improving outcomes are exactly what we need at this critical moment in our recovery from the pandemic, and I look to working with her to raise the bar for students with disabilities and their families."

Wright-Gallo has served as the assistant superintendent of special education in the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) in Washington since 2017. Prior to that, she spent seven years as the state director of special education for the Utah State Board of Education, following work as a classroom teacher and administrator.

She has over 25 years of public education experience supporting students with disabilities and adults entering and within the teaching profession. Her experience includes working in a school district as a special education teacher and an administrator before she served in leadership positions at Utah and Washington state educational agencies.

As the Utah State Board of Education's state director of special education, Wright-Gallo emphasized monitoring to improve outcomes—specifically under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Her work as Washington's assistant superintendent of special education in the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction enabled the state to strengthen collaboration between students with disabilities and general education partners and families.

"At the state level, I had the ability to work with stakeholders and partners to design a monitoring system that addressed the needs of



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

students across the state," Wright-Gallo said.

She also encouraged an examination of how resources were used and a consideration of opportunities to be more responsive to students' and families' needs.

Coming into her role as the OSERS assistant secretary, Wright-Gallo acknowledged the vital need for supporting infants, toddlers, children, youth and adults with disabilities at the right time in their lives.

"I have felt a sense of urgency in every position I've ever had," she said. "When I was a teacher, I was with those students for a year if I was lucky and had limited time to make a difference. At the state and federal levels, we must remember how important this work is and that what we accomplish will impact real children and families."

She noted the urgency is often due to the finite time allotted to each phase of development and learning for individuals with disabilities.

"We have a limited time for early intervention, for preschool, for pre-K through 12th grade and for post-secondary education. If someone isn't getting vocational rehabilitation services to help identify careers they are interested in and get the supports they need, there's a loss of earning potential and career advancement," Wright-Gallo said. "All of

these stages are very timebound and have a tremendous impact on the individual. If we lose sight of that, we lose our effectiveness."

Wright-Gallo's personal journey to improve people's lives started at a young age. She first gained an interest in programs serving students with disabilities during her middle school summers. Wright-Gallo's neighbor, who was a master's student at the University of Nevada – Las Vegas special education program, would take her daughter and Wright-Gallo to the university in the summers, where the two girls helped at the university's integrated preschool program.

In college as an education major, Wright-Gallo had not decided to specialize until she had the chance to take an introduction to special education course. "As part of the class, they had us do some site visits and observations," she said. "I knew immediately where I was meant to be and switched my focus of study to special education."

Wright-Gallo's undergraduate internships gave her the opportunity to work with students with behavioral support needs.

"I've been really intrigued by behavior and behavior as a form of communication," she said. "Every time I had the opportunity to dig into an area of interest, I took it. I was supported in my undergrad studies and throughout my entire career to be able to explore those options and interests, and it has led me to where I am today."

Wright-Gallo decided to pursue a master's degree in special education, which created opportunities in her district that allowed her to gain a specialized skill set around working with students with disabilities and students with the most significant behavioral support needs.

These experiences helped shape her path to leadership roles and attitude for improving the lives of individuals with disabilities.

"I think it's imperative that each of us takes a stand—that we identify what needs to be improved and commit to making those changes personally and professionally. That's the only way we are going to move ahead," Wright-Gallo said.

Source: U.S. Department of Education



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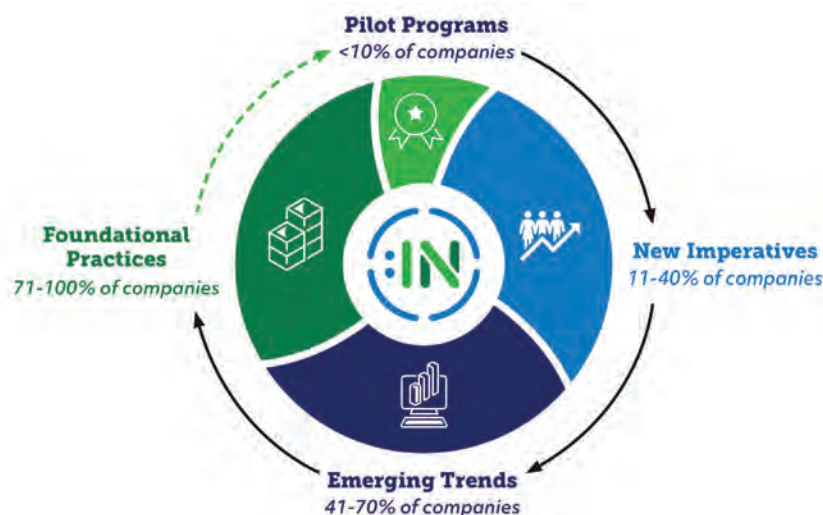
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## Leveraging Data & Insight

The 2024 Disability Equality Index builds upon 10 years of data and insight into corporate inclusion trends. Since its inception in 2015, participation in the DEI has grown 6x – from 80 companies in the DEI’s inaugural year to 485 in 2023. The Disability Equality Index (DEI) has become the leading independent, third-party resource for benchmarking disability inclusion policies and programs inside corporate America, and is now trusted by more than 70% of the Fortune 100 and nearly half of the Fortune 500.

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# Meet the Autistic Entrepreneur Changing the Beauty Industry

It can be easy for people to judge people with autism, especially when it comes to assumptions on what autistic individuals can and cannot do.

When Aaliyah Alicia Thompson was five years old, she was diagnosed with autism. Though her doctor made sure to tell her mother that she could have a fulfilling life in spite of her diagnosis, he also told her that she may never go to college, drive a car or have some of the regular experiences that other people do. But Thompson not only disproves these assumptions every day—she is creating a space to help others to do the same.

An outstanding student with a love of the beauty industry, Thompson made history late last year when she opened her very own beauty bar in Clayton County, Georgia at the age of 21. Unlike other beauty bars, known as a “one-stop-shop” for everything nails, make-

“I hope that my nail school will serve as a model for inclusive entrepreneurship and inspire others to pursue their dreams, no matter their background or challenges.”

— Aaliyah Alicia Thompson

up and hair, Thompson’s business strives for inclusivity—working with clients to achieve their most confident looks regardless of their hair type, skin color, shape, size or capabilities. The launch of Aaliyah’s Beauty Bar became the first beauty bar in the United States to be owned by a woman with autism and likely one of the most inclusive in the country.

But just eight months after her business’ launch, Thompson wanted to create a space where other autistic people could follow their own passions in the beauty industry. Inspired by her own experiences as an entrepreneur,



AALIYAH'S BEAUTY BAR

Thompson with other McDonald’s Change Leaders.

Thompson opened up a nail school in June of 2023; a first-of-its-kind institution designed to provide training and employment opportunities to individuals with autism. The nail school will offer a comprehensive curriculum that covers all aspects of nail design and care, as well as business management skills.

With a focus on providing personalized attention to each student, the school will ensure that every individual receives the support they need to succeed. Graduates of the program will have the skills and knowledge necessary to launch their own nail businesses or work in established salons.

“As someone with autism, I know firsthand the challenges of finding opportunities in the workforce,” Thompson stated in a press release. “But I also know that individuals with autism have unique talents and abilities that can be harnessed to achieve great things. I hope that my nail school will serve as a model for inclusive entrepreneurship and inspire others to pursue their dreams, no matter their

background or challenges.”

Though the beauty bar and nail school are both located in Georgia, Thompson’s reach goes further than the state’s borders. Her dedication to inclusivity has caught the attention of many in the beauty industry, including McDonald’s Black & Positively Golden Change Leaders program, where she currently serves as an ambassador. Through this program, McDonald’s has provided funding and a larger platform for Thompson to showcase her abilities and promote inclusivity for individuals with disabilities, raising awareness about their unique talents and skills.

“I am incredibly proud of Aaliyah and her dedication to inclusive entrepreneurship,” Laporsha Grier, Thompson’s mentor and sister said. “I have no doubt that her nail school will be a huge success and will pave the way for more inclusive and diverse businesses in the future.”

Sources: Aaliyah’s Beauty Bar, LinkedIn





**Aaliyah Alicia Thompson**

# The Latest in Inclusion Technology



## The OKO App

With a simple download, the OKO App makes every crosswalk an accessible crosswalk. Designed by AYES, a team of experienced AI engineers, the OKO App uses your phone's camera to detect and read crosswalk signals. When the user opens the app and holds their phone camera up to the crosswalk, AI technology will work to read and decipher whether a cross signal is calling for pedestrians to walk or wait. When the sign changes, the app will detect the change and alert its user through different beeping noises and a color changing screen when it is safe to walk or when the user shouldn't be crossing the street. The app can also detect if you are veering off into traffic and when you have reoriented yourself back on the crosswalk for an extra sense of security, and can be used with or without Wi-Fi or a cellular connection. The app even works when the phone is on airplane mode. The app is free and can be downloaded in the Apple store for iPhone users.

Source: AYES



## Redefining Accessible Tech: Keyboards for All

Considering that an astounding 96% of jobs require competent keyboarding skills, it's clearer than ever that we need to extend this focus and build keyboarding tools that encompass a wider range of disabilities. That's where Logickeyboard comes in—a company that makes keyboards with visual impairments and learning disabilities in mind. One of their most popular keyboards is the 6-dot braille QWERTY board, allowing braille users a more efficient typing mechanism. The keyboard, the first of its kind in the world, is available with and without large print, making it customizable to the user's visual needs. They also offer a warmly-colored dyslexia keyboard, written in dyslexia font and designed for an easier reading experience for individuals with dyslexia. Both the dyslexia and braille keyboards are available in wired or Bluetooth models to accompany everyone's office or home typing needs.

Source: Logickeyboard





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## Audio Streaming for Cochlear Implants

Cochlear Limited, a leading provider in cochlear implants, has announced a better way for those with implants to watch their favorite streaming services. Earlier this spring, Cochlear announced that it will now offer Audio Streaming for Hearing Aids (ASHA) support on compatible Fire TV devices for people living with hearing implant technology. The advancement represents the first time that a smart TV device will stream sound directly to a hearing implant sound processor. Cochlear has configured direct streaming from Fire TV to Cochlear Nucleus 8, Nucleus 7, Nucleus Kanso 2 and Baha 6 Max Sound processors. With ASHA, sound processors connect with the Fire TV device at the system level, so customers can enjoy audio from their favorite streaming apps, use Alexa, listen to music and navigational sounds, and more.

Source: Cochlear Limited



APPLE

## iPhone Accessibility Expands for Those with Cognitive Disabilities

Smart phones have long included features with visual and hearing impairments, but new features are coming to make a more accessible product for those with cognitive disabilities. Future Apple products will now include a program called "Assistive Access," which uses innovations in design to distill apps and experiences to their essential features in order to lighten the cognitive load. Assistive Access includes a customized experience for phone and FaceTime, which have been combined into a single calls app, as well as messages, camera, photos and music. The feature offers a distinct interface with high contrast buttons and large text labels, as well as tools to help trusted supporters tailor the experience for the individual they support. For example, for users who prefer communicating visually, messages include an emoji-only keyboard and the option to record a video message to share with loved ones. Users and trusted supporters can also choose between a more visual, grid-based layout for their home screen and apps, or a row-based layout for users who prefer text.

Source: Apple





## The Universal Tools Collection

Recognizing a need for more representation in the self-care aisle for the disability community, CVS Pharmacy developed the Universal Tools collection with inclusive design at the forefront. Designed by lived experience in collaboration with members of the disability community, the Universal Tools collection features six universally-comfortable-to-use self-care tools, including rounded tip scissors, slant tweezers, nail clippers, pumice stones and more. The tools include inclusive features such as wide, open handles and non-slip, easy-to-grip silicone patterns that are uniquely textured to distinguish from other tools, making self-care more accessible to people with certain disabilities. The tools can be found at any CVS location online and in stores.

Source: CVS Health

## This Toothbrush is Improving Lives for People with Disabilities

In 1972, the Swiss company CURAPROX launched Curaden to provide oral care products beyond just fresh breath and white teeth. Their newest invention, Samba, is taking their plans further. Samba is the world's first toothbrush created to allow people with disabilities to brush their teeth effectively and independently. Studies have shown that 88% of individuals with disabilities suffer from dental problems, highlighting the urgent need for a tailored solution.

Samba utilizes a pioneering combination of low- and high-frequency oscillations, propelling 12,900 soft bristles along the teeth with a dynamic brushing motion that helps remove plaque and debris thoroughly from the teeth and gums. The device can clean 36 tooth surfaces simultaneously and even reduces the average time needed for brushing your teeth without the device. It also eliminates the need for manual hand movements, which can be helpful for individuals with arthritis or similar conditions who struggle with the hand intricacies needed for manual teeth brushing.

The product is currently only available in the U.S. and can be purchased online through Samba's official website: [curaprox.us/shop/ortho-care/samba-toothbrush](https://curaprox.us/shop/ortho-care/samba-toothbrush).

Sources: CURAPROX, Dental Products Report



# The Rise & Thrive of Sensory-Friendly Performances

By Natalie Rodgers



From the tragedies of Socrates and Shakespearean comedies to the modern-day hip-hop musicals of today, theatre has been one of civilization's oldest and most beloved sources of entertainment. However, between the loud music and sound effects, the darkness of the theatre and the unprecedented nature that comes with performances, theatre can be overstimulating to certain individuals with autism, sensory differences and learning disabilities.

But thanks to a newer trend that has quickly been adapted to big Broadway stages and local community theatres alike, theatre has become inclusive in a whole new way.

Known as sensory-friendly or relaxed performances, these new kinds of shows take the classic musicals, plays or orchestra performances you love and tweak them to be more sensory-friendly. Instead of entering a dark theatre where you have to remain quiet and unaware of what's to come, sensory-friendly performances usually keep the lights on during a performance, tone down the rigidity of the theatre etiquette and provide audience members with information on the performance prior to the show.

*DIVERSEability Magazine (DM)* took the time to sit down with Jack White, otherwise known as 'All That Jack,' a London-based social media influencer who specializes in theatre reviews and theatre-related content. As an autistic individual with ADHD, White has used his platform to share his experiences as a theatre goer and gives his perspective on how to best enjoy live performances as an autistic person.

Having attended many relaxed performances himself, White gave us his two cents on how these kinds of performances have improved the theatre community:

**DM: What does a relaxed or sensory-friendly performance usually consist of?**

**Jack White (JW):** Relaxed performances take a lot of the rigidity and etiquette

COURTESY OF JACK WHITE





COURTESY OF JACK WHITE

that comes with theatre and tones it all the way down. A lot of theatres typically send a PDF before the show that gives visual information about the venue and the story of the performance. It can include information about the entrance, what they'll see in the show, the effects used and where the bathrooms are. Some theatres even do familiarization visits where people can come to the theatre the day before the performance and see where everything is

**“In a relaxed performance, the audience can feel comfortable to stim, talk or move around without any judgement from anyone else.”**

– Jack White

and where they'll be sitting.

The show will usually have “chill out rooms” where people can go before or even during the performance if they need a break from the stimuli around them. These rooms usually have television screens of the performance that they can watch from these rooms, so they don't miss anything from the show. Many performances will also include an introduction at the very beginning where key cast and crew members from the show will come

out and explain what the audience is about to see and introduce themselves. For some people with learning disabilities, it can be helpful to understand beforehand that an actor is playing a character and isn't actually a villain or being hurt.

**DM: How is a relaxed/sensory-friendly production different from other performances?**

**JW:** The show is the same, but there are effects that are reduced or taken out completely. Bright lights are usually toned down and effects like strobe lights, explosions and jump scares are either massively reduced or taken out of the show completely. There's also an understanding that people may be using fidget toys or walk around during the performance, which isn't usually acceptable behavior during regular performances. In a relaxed performance, the audience can feel comfort-



COURTESY OF JACK WHITE

able to stim, talk or move around without any judgement from anyone else.

There are also volunteers from autism charities that might be present to help answer questions, and volunteers who know sign language for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. Relaxed performances are also a great environment for families to take their children to and not have to worry too much about their behavior or how other people will react to those behaviors.

**DM: Are there consultants that productions work with to ensure they are building an effective relaxed performance?**

**JW:** Yes! So, in the UK, there's a group called the National Autistic Society who has worked with theatres to create relaxed performances and advise on the best ways to do that. There are also nonprofit organizations like Go Live, which worked on a performance of “Wicked” here, and also work to make theatre more affordable and accessible to children with disabilities as a way to encourage them to pursue the arts.

It's important that a theatre company at least consults a group of people with autism, or those who would benefit from relaxed performances, before putting one on. Not every autistic person has the same experiences, but there are a lot of commonalities that can help people and it's important for theatres to be aware of what those are before branding a performance as relaxed.

**DM: As an autistic individual yourself, how do these performances make the theatre-going experience more enjoyable for you?**

**JW:** I feel the most comfortable around other autistic or neurodivergent individuals because there's no judgement for being ourselves. I think the best part for me is being around other autistic and neurodivergent people in a safe, inclusive environment. There's no judgement for shifting in your chair, stimming or talking during the performance, and you can enjoy a theatrical experience with other people who love theatre or have a special interest in theatre.

For more information on relaxed and sensory-friendly performances, make sure to check in with your local theatres and visit White's Instagram @allthatjacktheatre for more information.



# Despite a Leg Amputation, Army Sgt. Brandon Korona Lives Life Without Limitations

By Kellie Speed

When Army Sgt. Brandon Korona first deployed to Afghanistan in 2013 with the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, they were on a route clearance in search of IEDs. Their company was divided into two route clearance packages when he was hit by an IED on June 23, 2013.

Korona nearly broke every bone below his left knee. After spending two years at Walter Reed Hospital, undergoing multiple surgeries in an attempt to reconstruct his heel, he continued to be in a lot of pain.

After four years of continuous pain and being unable to do the things he had done prior to his injury, Korona made the difficult decision to have his left leg amputated.

"They tried to put my leg back together, but it didn't work, and my ankle never healed," he said. "The catalyst was an ankle fusion as a last-ditch effort, but the quality of life just wasn't there. When I got out of the Army, I made the decision to have it amputated. I was at a point where my life was kind of stagnant. I was in pain; I couldn't walk around the mall with my wife, as it was hindering me greatly," Korona concluded.

He was presented with the opportunity to undergo an experimental surgical procedure called the Ewing Amputation. "I made the decision to undergo the experimental amputation," he said. "I was the second person to have it done and the first one in the military. It has now spread throughout different military hospitals."

When Dr. Matt Carty of Brigham & Women's Hospital initially discussed it, it sounded almost too good to be true. "They said I would be able to feel sensations and there would be no phantom pain," Korona said. "What's the catch? You have to get your leg cut off, but I decided to have the surgery in April and by August, I was up and walking."

He continues, "Barring minor issues with



COURTESY OF BRANDON KORONA



my skin, I have been up and moving without pain since 2017. I was stuck prior to having the amputation. It bogged me down big time. Now, I never let anything stop me. I live my life like I don't have a limitation."

In September 2021, Korona became the recipient of a new home from Homes for Our Troops. "After I got out of the Army, we lived in a house that had a lot of stairs, and it was very difficult for me to get around on crutches," he said. "This house allows me to be in a wheelchair, so I am able to function and it takes away my limitations. I use my wheelchair every night."

Korona continues, "It's incredible to be not stuck in a prosthetic all day. I can do everything with a leg, but now in a wheelchair. To have been given an opportunity to have a mortgage-free home allows me to be able to pursue other things and I don't have the financial limitations either."

Originally from Massachusetts, Korona now lives with his wife and two sons in New Hampshire. "I have PTSD and am an ampu-



COURTESY OF BRANDON KORONA

tee, but I don't let it get in my way more than it should," he said.

From receiving his MBA and becoming a senior subcontracts administrator to running 5Ks and 10Ks and playing on the Wounded Warrior football team, being medically



COURTESY OF BRANDON KORONA

retired hasn't stopped Korona from achieving his dreams.

"I don't look at myself as someone who has a disability," he said. "I look at myself just like everyone else."

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### Who we are

The National Employment Team (NET) is a group of designated business consultants from each of the 78 public vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies that collaborate across the country to work with company partners. The NET has consultants in all 50 states, the territories and D.C. that provide no-cost business services, technical assistance, and consultation. The team has direct access to a national talent pool of qualified candidates with disabilities, including Veterans.

The NET works with business customers to build a strategy and provide support services across the footprint of a business which includes private, public, Federal, and non-profit organizations. The team can deliver business services and candidates across a national and/or multi-state market as well as the local level. The NET collaborated with disABLEDpersons to build the Talent Acquisition Portal or TAP to provide easy access to a talent pool of candidates with disabilities across the country.

### What we do

TAP is a fully accessible talent platform that enables business to easily connect to talent and qualified candidates with disabilities have access to employment opportunities with businesses across the country.

TAP enables business to connect to candidates directly and is also able to host virtual hiring events. Businesses who are federal contractors can also use TAP to gather and track compliance data. The NET and TAP work collaboratively to support business customers across the country....connect with us!





# How Massachusetts' Governor is Advocating for Queer- & Disability-Owned Businesses

Efforts to support supplier diversity partnerships and the general needs of minority-owned small businesses have increased and improved within the last several years. However, two new initiatives in Massachusetts could set the new standard for inclusion, especially when it comes to LGBTQ+ and disability-owned business enterprises.

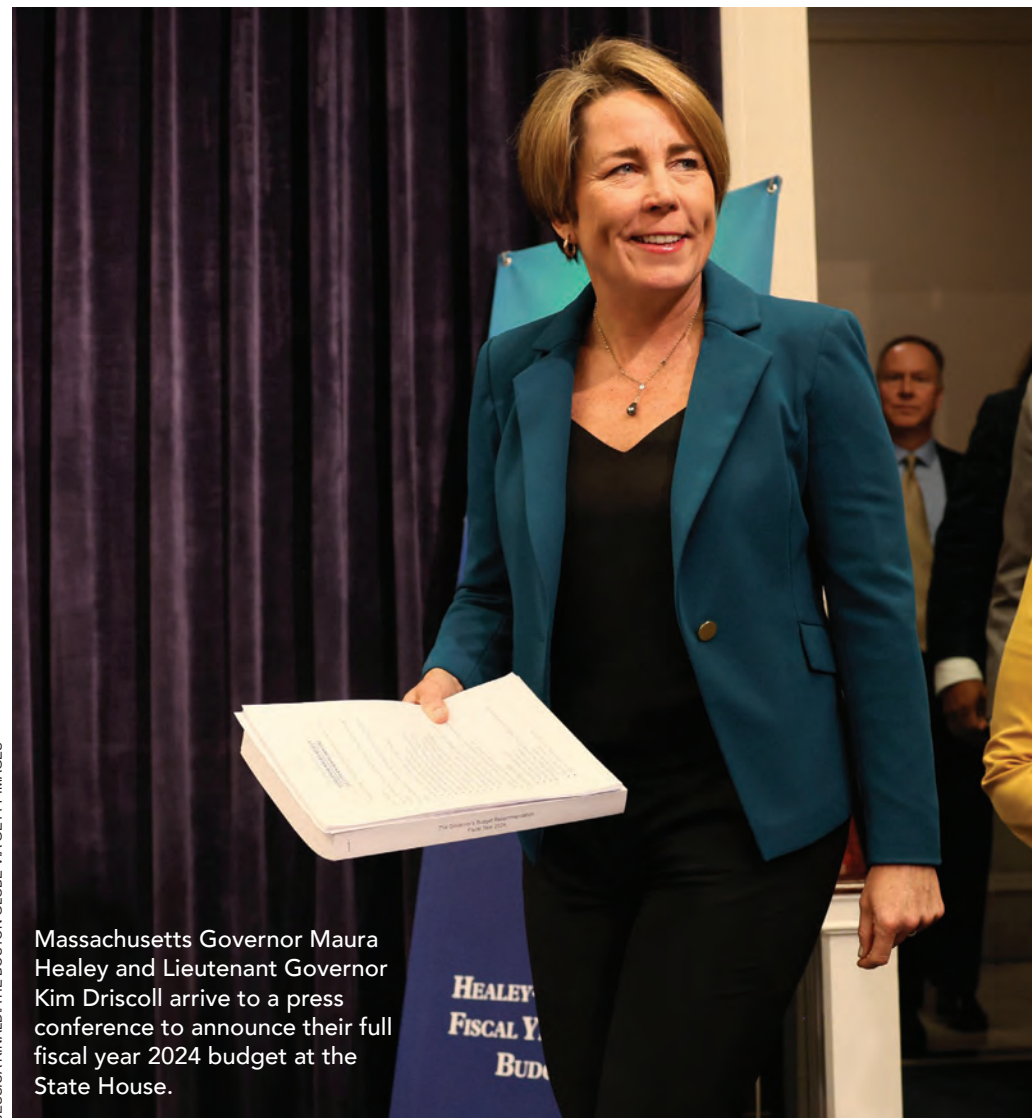
As part of her plan to make a more inclusive, sustainable community in her home state, Governor Maura Healey, along with Lt. Governor Kim Driscoll, announced two new initiatives aimed at expanding opportunities for diverse and small businesses to provide goods and services to state agencies and local governments.

The first initiative will focus on updating the commonwealth's supplier diversity program to be more inclusive of LGBTQ+ Owned Business Enterprises (LGBTBE) and Disability-Owned Business Enterprises (DOBE).

In 2015, Massachusetts' Supplier Diversity Office (SDO) expanded their efforts to include veteran-, disability- and LGBTQ+ owned businesses, which made Massachusetts the most inclusive state supplier diversity program in the nation. However, this expansion did not set a benchmark spending point for the latter two business types.

As of July 1, benchmarks were finally established for each business type. State agencies will now work towards purchasing \$18 million from LGBTQ+ owned businesses and \$18 million from businesses owned by individuals with disabilities during fiscal year 2024.

After evaluating purchasing against these benchmarks over the next year, the administration will set new goals for fiscal year 2025. This will expand on the state's 2015 accomplishment that made Massachusetts businesses that qualify for these funds to be recognized by DOBE and LGBTBE certifications issued by reputable third-party certification organizations, such as Disability:IN and the National LGBT Chamber of Commerce



Massachusetts Governor Maura Healey and Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll arrive to a press conference to announce their full fiscal year 2024 budget at the State House.

JESSICA RINALDI/THE BOSTON GLOBE VIA GETTY IMAGES

(NGLCC).

"Establishing a spending benchmark for disability-owned businesses in Massachusetts is a key step towards creating a more equitable and inclusive economy," Joe Belli, vice president of public affairs and youth services for Easterseals Massachusetts commented. "By supporting these businesses, the commonwealth is investing in the talents, skills and potential of individuals with disabilities."

Grace Moreno, executive director of the Massachusetts LGBT Chamber of Commerce, additionally stated of the benchmarks: "Governor Healey recognizes that an important way to lure businesses to Massachusetts is to show that our state is a welcoming place to do business for all people, including those identifying as LGBTQ. This announcement is yet another step in that direction. It helps LGBTQ businesses grow and thrive in Massachusetts





“Massachusetts is home to so many wonderful diverse and small businesses who are truly the backbone of our communities and our economy. We are proud to be expanding the state’s spending benchmarks to include businesses owned by LGBTQIA+ individuals and individuals with disabilities, as well as implementing a new tool to make it easier for organizations to connect with diverse business partners.”

– Governor Maura Healey

while helping to expand our economy.”

The second initiative will focus on connecting these businesses with larger scale corporations through the Massachusetts Certified Business Map, an interactive online map that will help state agencies, cities, towns and prime bidders and contractors locate certified diverse business partners based on location as well as other criteria.

Users can search by in-state and out-of-

state, county, city or town, certification type and by business name. This can be especially helpful for projects needing subcontractors who do business in a certain area of the state. Displayed information includes Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) business count, state business count and counts by certification type, for-profit and nonprofit, and business nature type.

The map is the SDO’s latest innovation to increase equity in state purchasing. Since becoming a new agency in 2021, the SDO has introduced the Supplier Diversity Hub, a powerful network that streamlines communication between state agencies, cities, towns, prime con-

tractors and diverse and small businesses; and the resources webpage for diverse and small businesses, the Municipal Supplier Diversity Playbook and the SDO Means Business Model, which provides resources and tools to eliminate barriers and uplift diverse and small businesses.

These announcements come after the SDO issued their fiscal year 2022 annual report, which reported growth in spending with diverse and small businesses and the number of certified businesses, as well as other new programs and initiatives.

“Massachusetts is home to so many wonderful diverse and small businesses who are truly the backbone of our communities and our economy,” Healey stated of her home state. “We are proud to be expanding the state’s spending benchmarks to include businesses owned by LGBTQIA+ individuals and individuals with disabilities, as well as implementing a new tool to make it easier for organizations to connect with diverse business partners.”

These inclusive additions to the state’s thriving supplier diversity program are also a testament to Healey’s overall efforts as governor. Since being elected in late 2022, Healey has worked nonstop to create a more inclusive community within the state of Massachusetts. In her first 100 days of office, Healey had successfully begun to carry out initiatives that would secure equal access to health care, fund government programs and increase affordability in the state. As the nation’s first openly lesbian governor, these efforts have also widely included resources that would be specifically helpful to the LGBTQ+ community.

While no other states have announced similar initiatives since Healey launched this program, having the most established state supplier diversity program take on these expansions could encourage other states to take similar steps to advance inclusion across the country.

Sources: Politico, Mass.gov

# 2023 Disability:IN Global Conference Celebrates #DisabilityPride With 4,500 in Attendance

Disability:IN, the global organization driving disability inclusion and equality in business, held its 2023 global conference July 10-13, 2023, at the JW Marriott Orlando in Orlando, Florida.

“As we reflect on the 2023 global conference, our hearts are filled with gratitude for our community. This year’s conference was filled with impactful conversations, lifetime (re)connections made and so much #DisabilityPride! And it is all because of you,” the organization stated in a conference recap email to attendees. “Thank you to each and every one of you who helped make this year’s conference one to remember.”

## The Disability:IN 2023 conference at a glance:

- 4,500 attendees (virtual & in-person)
- 40 countries represented
- 70 certified Disability-Owned Business Enterprises (DOBEs)
- 400+ DOBE matchmaking meetings with companies
- 67 NextGen Leaders
- 250+ interviews, resulting in 26 job/internship offers to-date

## Other highlights included:

The winner of this year’s Disability:IN Pitch Perfect Challenge was Fiona Dawson, director of Free Lion Productions.

Disability:IN also announced the winners of its 2023 Inclusion Awards, recognizing visionary brands and individuals for outstanding disability inclusion efforts from the organization’s more than 500 corporate partners.

“The recipients of the 2023 Inclusion Awards are proving that businesses truly do have the power to drive the global advancement of disability inclusion, accessibility and equality,” said Jill Houghton, president & CEO of Disability:IN. “These companies and individuals go the extra mile every day to create an environment where people with disabilities can be their authentic selves and flourish in all areas of life. We applaud their hard work and innovation as we work together



JORDON NICHOLSON

er towards this shared goal.”

**Employer of the Year** winner Walgreens Boots Alliance has long placed the full inclusion of people with disabilities at the forefront of the company’s mission. To build on its long-standing commitment to hiring people with disabilities, Walgreens has now dedicated itself to representing people with disabilities at all levels of the company’s U.S. segments. Perhaps most notably, Walgreens has redesigned its employee bonus plan to include a disability representation metric to drive this commitment, making it the first company in the S&P 500 to include disability representation as a separate, standalone metric within a disclosed incentive plan.

An important new category, **Autism Inclusion Company of the Year**, was awarded to Dell Technologies. Presented in partnership with software company SAP,

this new category is designed to recognize a company for innovative policies, strategies and initiatives that have driven measurable results in the areas of hiring, retaining and advancing autistic colleagues both in the U.S. and internationally.

## Other 2023 Inclusion Award winners included:

- **Accessible Product of the Year:** General Motors
- **Affiliate of the Year:** Disability:IN Utah
- **ERG/BRG of the Year:** Chevron
- **ERG/BRG Executive Sponsor of the Year:** Rady Johnson of Pfizer
- **Inclusive Marketing Campaign of the Year:** Google
- **John D. Kemp Leadership Award:** Jenny Lay-Flurrie of Microsoft
- **Mary Brougher Supplier Diversity Advocate of the Year Award:** Darlene Fuller of Sodexo
- **NextGen Leader Alum of the Year:** Danny Sanchez of Northrop Grumman
- **Supplier of the Year:** Rangan
- **Top Corporation for Disability-Owned Businesses:** Ally Financial

Disability:IN hopes to keep the momentum from this conference going as we continue our shared journey toward building inclusive and accessible businesses for all. #AreYou-IN?

Save the date for the 2024 Disability:IN conference, held July 15-18, 2024, at the Cosmopolitan in Las Vegas, Nevada. For more information, visit [disabilityin.org](https://disabilityin.org).



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# The Arc: Building Strong Leaders in the Disability Field

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) need robust support and rights in order to live the lives they choose and have a good quality of life. None of that is possible without the passion and power of service professionals and advocates. In late July, The Arc brought together over 250 people in the IDD field in sunny Las Vegas for our Summer Leadership Institute (SLI). SLI is an intimate conference where leaders and rising stars can network and develop their careers, programs and organizations to serve their community better and adapt to emerging changes. It's also an excellent opportunity for The Arc's chapter network and other disability organizations to mentor and learn from up-and-coming leaders bringing fresh perspectives to the field. Most importantly, SLI is a welcoming space for growth and camaraderie that helps people refuel to keep the fight for inclusion of the IDD community going strong.

While there is always a focus on the latest threats and opportunities in disability rights

and services, we also work hard to bring speakers with inspiring ideas that help attendees shift their mindsets and grow in their effectiveness. These sessions were particularly thought-provoking and timely:

- Russell Lehmann, an internationally recognized motivational speaker, poet, author and board member for The Arc, gave a powerful presentation on "Inclusion: Not Just 'in' the Community But 'of' the Community." Lehmann challenged assumptions on what true inclusion means and gave a glimpse into how he experiences our society as an autistic person. His takeaway: it's not just about inviting people with IDD into our spaces; it's about us wanting to be a part of their spaces, as well.
- Kevin MacDonald, CEO of Santa Clarita Valley Senior Center, spoke about "Building Relationships – The Arc Way," stressing that being a leader is all about relationships, not just relationships with



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COURTESY OF THE ARC

people in high places. His takeaway: a simple conversation may turn into a lifelong friendship.

- Dr. Hassan Abdulhaqq, vice president of talent acquisition, development and engagement at AHRC Nassau, closed the conference with a lively talk on "Emotional Intelligence (EQ) in the Workplace." He gave practical tips on how to engage employees better and promote a healthy, positive working environment.





There is truly something for everyone at The Arc's events. We hope you'll join us for the educational and social event of the year, The Arc's National Convention, taking place November 6-8, 2023, in New Orleans. We have a unique lineup of thought leaders from across the disability community and can't-miss networking events that bring together professionals, self-advocates and family members. Register by September 15th at [thearc.org/convention](https://thearc.org/convention) to get our early-bird rates!



# Changing the Paradigm of Employment: The Autism Society of America's Innovative Approach

By Christopher Banks

In today's rapidly evolving world, we must continue to reassess and reimagine the systems and structures that guide our daily lives to ensure equity for all. Employment, a critical aspect of adulthood and independence, is one such area that requires a fresh perspective, especially for Autistic individuals. The Autism Society of America and our grassroots network of over 70 affiliates, are leading the transformation through our Employment Initiative.

The Autism Society's Employment Initiative aims to create meaningful job opportunities, improve retention and break down systemic barriers by:

- Educating employers to build inclusive hiring models.
- Training teams for supportive services and accommodations.
- Connecting Autistic employees to job opportunities.
- Working to reduce systemic barriers to meaningful employment.

## A New Approach: The Fulfillment Mindset

The Fulfillment Mindset recognizes that there are numerous ways for Autistic individuals to achieve fulfillment through employment. This can include continued learning, passion projects, job/career shadowing, volunteering, coaching and part-time or full-time integration into competitive integrated employment. By focusing on whole-person integration in employment and community surroundings, we can better support those with Autism in workplace settings and throughout their lives.

THE AUTISM SOCIETY





## Exploring and Expanding Opportunity

The interests, strengths and passions of Autistic employees are vast, extending across industries and roles. At the Autism Society, we seek to empower Autistic individuals to make informed career decisions while promoting diversity and inclusion in the workforce. Beyond increasing job opportunities for individuals with Autism, the Employment Initiative generates resources and connections which supports job exploration across fields, job stability and retention, and career advancement across the lifespan. By fostering partnerships with companies, building coalitions with other nonprofits and creating community connections across industries, we are committed to ensuring that everyone in the Autism community has the opportunity to experience fulfillment through employment, exploration and innovation.

## Inclusion for All

The Autism spectrum is broad, and individuals have differing needs. Everyone, regardless of their learning styles, workplace preferences and support needs, deserves to experience fulfillment and contribute meaningfully to their community. Leveraging principles of universal design and a margin-to-center approach, the Autism Society strives to create more inclusive environments and systems that ensure individuals with diverse needs can thrive in their chosen paths.

## Building Stronger Networks

The Employment Initiative is part of a broader strategy to build coalitions, connections and resources that support the Autistic community. We are dedicated to identifying organizations and programs that allow individuals with Autism, including those with the most complex support needs, to explore their interests and expand their skills in a variety of fields and industries. Collaborating with other organizations and leveraging shared resources enhances the ability to create diverse, fun, interesting and fulfilling opportunities for all Autistic individuals.

## A Brighter Future

Together with our 70 affiliates, the Autism Society is committed to redefining employment for Autistic individuals by encouraging social-emotional fulfillment, exploring diverse industries and maintaining necessary benefits. By emphasizing whole-person integration, the Autism Society aims to create a more inclusive and supportive landscape for Autistic individuals to achieve success in their employment journeys. Let's celebrate the unique strengths and abilities of the Autism community and work towards a future filled with diverse, fun, interesting and fulfilling opportunities for all. Together, we can build a more inclusive and equitable future.

Learn more about the Autism Society and get connected to employment information and resources today at [autismsociety.org/resources/employment](https://autismsociety.org/resources/employment).



# Acknowledging Barriers to Creating Opportunities: Amputee Coalition Workforce Development for the Limb Loss & Limb Difference Community

By Cass Isidro, Amputee Coalition President and CEO



COURTESY OF AMPUTEE COALITION



As the rapidly changing employment marketplace continues to evolve, the pursuit of inclusive workforce development opportunities and programs have gained momentum. Strides have been made in diversity and inclusion, yet there is a gap in addressing the needs of the limb loss and limb difference community.

The Great Resignation was felt nationwide, but people with limb loss and limb difference continue to experience barriers to career entry, employment and workplace progression.

From reaching people who have recently experienced amputation with critical recovery information to providing daily tips to make living and working with limb loss easier, the Amputee Coalition is dedicated to impacting lives of people with disabilities every day.

## What We Know

Every day, more than 500 people in the U.S. lose a limb and it is estimated that, by 2050, the number of people living with limb loss will nearly double. We also know that more than four million Americans are living with limb loss and limb difference, with 28 million more at risk. Limb loss is a physically and psychologically life-changing event. Amputation and prosthetics use does not only affect an individual's physical abilities, but it also signifies lifelong social, psychological, economic and environmental change.

Studies show children living with disabilities are more likely to come from disadvantaged backgrounds and fall behind peers living without disabilities in categories such as education, occupation and social engagement when in adulthood. Black Americans are four times more likely to experience amputation for any reason than white Americans, and are nearly two times more likely to experience diabetes-related amputations.

Latino Americans are one-and-a-half times more likely to experience amputation for any reason than white Americans, and 30% more likely to experience a major amputation related to a diabetic foot infection than white Americans. Indigenous Americans are up to 70% more likely to experience amputation

for any reason than insured, non-Indigenous Americans.

People living with limb loss who have a household income at or near the poverty line were up to three-and-a-half times more likely to experience barriers to participation in work and community life. The rate of amputations across the country grew by 50% between 2009 and 2015. Diabetics undergo 130,000 amputations each year, often in low-income and underinsured neighborhoods.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, specifically within the Office of Disability Employment Policy, as of July 2023, the unemployment rate for those with disabilities, ages 16-64, is 7.6%. In comparison, the unemployment rate for those without disability, ages 16-64, is 3.7%. The 3.9% difference directly shows a need for employment opportunities and resources for those with limb loss and limb difference to help decrease the unemployment gap.

## Acknowledging Barriers

Accessibility in the workplace that lacks proper ADA accommodations, such as wheelchair ramps, elevators, adjustable workstations, medical equipment or assistive technology, can limit the participation and job performance of limb loss and limb difference individuals. Inadequate access to resources addressing mental health after amputation and coping with limb loss or limb difference can take a toll on well-being. Anxiety, depression and self-esteem issues can impact job search, employee retention and career development. Access to education and vocational training that caters to the needs of the limb loss and limb difference community is often limited, restricting skill development and job readiness.

## Creating Opportunities

Despite these challenges, progress is occurring for the limb loss and limb difference community in the workforce. The Amputee Coalition Workforce Development Program is designed to assist youth, adults and veteran participants within the limb loss and limb difference community with starting their journey or transitioning back into the workforce. The Amputee Coalition creates a pathway for individuals living with limb loss or limb difference to access employment resources, and aligns with companies adhering to hiring practices for individuals with disabilities. The program is

designed specifically to provide resources and job opportunities for those with limb loss or limb difference who are looking for employment.

Resources through the Amputee Coalition Workforce Development Program include one-on-one career development meetings, resume building and webinars on job-related content, expanding from career exploration to follow-up with an employer after an interview. Growing workforce development initiatives and partnerships throughout the nation are critical to supporting the limb loss and limb difference community. The following organizations are dedicated to creating such pathways: AgrAbility, Flint Public Health

Every day, more than  
**500**  
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Youth Academy, Progressive Support Services, Career Source of Central Florida, EasterSeals of Central Florida, Lockheed Martin, Vocational Rehabilitation (Orlando), Office of Disability Employment Policy, Hanger Clinic, Syracuse University's Institute of Veterans and Military Families, Center for Independent Living of Central Florida, Global Connections to Employment, and many more.

PALS—the online interactive program to help manage life after limb loss—in partnership with the Amputee Coalition and Johns Hopkins Medicine, offers a platform to work with individuals and their primary doctors in recovery. The collaboration with BI Medical and the Amputee Coalition on Vocational Rehabilitation are partnerships that are vital to the limb loss and limb difference community for people aiming to regain independence through employment or continued education.

Employment opportunities and workforce development for the limb loss and limb difference community is a space worthy of championing and we must continue the work to create inclusive workplaces and bridge opportunities for all.





# Conference Calendar

## OCTOBER

### Hire GI

Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
[hiregi.com](http://hiregi.com)

### Small Business Expo

Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
[thesmallbusinessexpo.com](http://thesmallbusinessexpo.com)

### City Career Fair

**Diversity Employment Day**  
Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
[citycareerfair.com](http://citycareerfair.com)

### NCRF Black College Expo

**Virtual Event**  
Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
[thecollegeexpo.org](http://thecollegeexpo.org)

### Prospanica Conference

October 18-20  
Las Vegas, NV  
[prospanica.org/conference-and-career-expo](http://prospanica.org/conference-and-career-expo)

### AISES National Convention

October 19-21  
Spokane, WA  
[aises.org](http://aises.org)

### USA Science & Engineering Festival

**X-STEM Nova**  
October 20  
Leesburg, VA  
[usasciencefestival.org](http://usasciencefestival.org)

### NMSDC Annual Conference and Exchange

October 22-25  
Baltimore, MD  
[nmsdc.org](http://nmsdc.org)

### AFWA Conference

October 25-27  
Reno, NV  
[afwa.org](http://afwa.org)

### SACNAS Conference

October 26-28  
Portland, OR  
[sacnas.org](http://sacnas.org)

### SWE Conference

October 26-28  
Los Angeles, CA  
[swe.org](http://swe.org)

### HACU Conference

October 28-30  
Chicago, IL  
[hacu.net](http://hacu.net)

### CSAVR 2023 Fall Conference

October 28 – November 1  
Savannah, GA  
[csavr.org](http://csavr.org)

## NOVEMBER

### Hire GI

Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
[hiregi.com](http://hiregi.com)

### Small Business Expo

Multiple Events  
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[thesmallbusinessexpo.com](http://thesmallbusinessexpo.com)

### City Career Fair

**Diversity Employment Day**  
Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
[citycareerfair.com](http://citycareerfair.com)

### NVTSI REBOOT

**Virtual Workshop**  
Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
[nvtsi.org](http://nvtsi.org)

### From Day One

**Forum**  
Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
[fromdayone.co](http://fromdayone.co)

### SAME Federal Small Business Conference

November 1-3  
San Antonio, TX  
[samesbc.org](http://samesbc.org)

### SHPE Conference

November 1-5  
Salt Lake City, UT  
[shpe.org](http://shpe.org)

### Afrotech Conference

November 1-5  
Austin, TX  
[afrotech.com](http://afrotech.com)

### NAWRB Conference

November 5-7  
Washington, D.C.  
[nawrbconference.com](http://nawrbconference.com)

### 2023 LAWYERS FOR WARRIORS

November 6  
Santa Ana, CA  
[vetslegal.com](http://vetslegal.com)

### The Arc National Convention

November 6-8  
New Orleans, LA  
[thearc.org](http://thearc.org)

### HBCU Career Development Marketplace

November 7-10  
Baltimore, MD  
[hbcucareermarket.org](http://hbcucareermarket.org)

### DVNF Veteran Resource Fair

November 8  
Silver Springs, MD  
[dvnf.org](http://dvnf.org)

### NVBDC National Veteran Matchmaking Conference

November 8-9  
Indianapolis, IN  
[nvbdc.org](http://nvbdc.org)

### OSTEM Conference

November 9-12  
Anaheim, CA  
[ostem.org](http://ostem.org)

### ND Vets Gala

November 10  
Los Angeles, CA  
[ndvets.org](http://ndvets.org)

### LULAC LGBTQ+ Summit

November 10-12  
Las Vegas, NV  
[lulac.org](http://lulac.org)

### 7th Annual VIB National Conference

November 13-14  
San Diego, CA  
[vibnetwork.org](http://vibnetwork.org)

### Linkage's Women in Leadership Conference

November 13-16  
Orlando, FL + Virtual  
[linkageinc.com](http://linkageinc.com)

### CHCI Tech Summit

November 14  
TBA  
[chci.org](http://chci.org)

### ABRCMS Conference

November 15-18  
Phoenix, AZ  
[abrcms.org](http://abrcms.org)

Events subject to change. For the complete conference calendar, visit [diverseabilitymagazine.com](http://diverseabilitymagazine.com).  
Send your conference announcements to [partnerships@diversitycomm.net](mailto:partnerships@diversitycomm.net).



## DECEMBER

### Hire GI

Multiple Events  
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[hiregi.com](http://hiregi.com)

### Small Business Expo

Multiple Events  
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[thesmallbusinessexpo.com](http://thesmallbusinessexpo.com)

### City Career Fair

#### Diversity Employment Day

Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
[citycareerfair.com](http://citycareerfair.com)

### From Day One Forum

Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
[fromdayone.co](http://fromdayone.co)

### Abilities Expo

December 1-3  
Dallas, TX  
[abilities.com](http://abilities.com)

### NVTSI REBOOT

Virtual Workshop  
December 4-15  
[nvt.si.org](http://nvt.si.org)

### Military Mojo

December 7-8  
Philadelphia, PA  
[militarymojo.org](http://militarymojo.org)

## JANUARY

### NVTSI REBOOT

#### Virtual Workshop

Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
[nvt.si.org](http://nvt.si.org)

### Hire GI

Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
[hiregi.com](http://hiregi.com)

### NCRF Black College Expo

#### Virtual Event

Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
[thecollegeexpo.org](http://thecollegeexpo.org)

### SVA Conference

January 4-6  
Nashville, TN  
[studentveterans.org](http://studentveterans.org)

### CES 2024

January 9-12  
Nashville, TN  
[ces.tech](http://ces.tech)

### CCME Symposium

January 29  
Aurora, CO  
[ccmeonline.org/symposium](http://ccmeonline.org/symposium)

## FEBRUARY

### From Day One Forum

Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
[fromdayone.com](http://fromdayone.com)

### NCRF Black College Expo

#### Virtual Event

Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
[thecollegeexpo.org](http://thecollegeexpo.org)

### Small Business Expo

Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
[thesmallbusinessexpo.com](http://thesmallbusinessexpo.com)

### NAWBO Leadership Academy

February 6-7  
Long Beach, CA  
[nawbo.org](http://nawbo.org)

### CA Steam Symposium

February 9-10  
Long Beach, CA  
[cdefoundation.org](http://cdefoundation.org)

### GEO Week Conference

February 11-14  
Denver, CO  
[geo-week.com](http://geo-week.com)

### USPAACC Innovation Symposium

February 15-16  
Washington, D.C.  
[uspaacc.com](http://uspaacc.com)

### BEYA Stem

February 15-17  
Baltimore, MD  
[intouch.ccmag.com](http://intouch.ccmag.com)

### VIVE Event

February 25-28  
Los Angeles, CA  
[viveevent.com](http://viveevent.com)

### Value of a Veteran Conference

February 27-29  
San Diego, CA  
[veteranrecruitingconference.com](http://veteranrecruitingconference.com)

### Ultimate Corporate Communications Conference

CCOs Driving Results  
February 29  
New York, NY  
[conference-board.org](http://conference-board.org)

## MARCH

### NCRF Black College Expo

#### Virtual Event

Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
[thecollegeexpo.org](http://thecollegeexpo.org)

### Hire GI

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See Calendar  
[hiregi.com](http://hiregi.com)

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Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
[citycareerfair.com](http://citycareerfair.com)

### Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Conference

March 5-6  
Atlanta, GA  
[conference-board.org/conferences](http://conference-board.org/conferences)

### Prospanica Leadership Summit

March 7-9  
Dallas, TX  
[prospanica.org](http://prospanica.org)

### WITI Hall of Fame Awards

Virtual Event  
March 8  
[witi.com](http://witi.com)

### HACR Latina Empow(h)er Summit

March 11-13  
Dallas, TX  
[hacr.org](http://hacr.org)

### Abilities Expo

March 15-17  
Los Angeles, CA  
[abilities.com](http://abilities.com)

### CSUN

March 18-22  
Anaheim, CA  
[csun.edu](http://csun.edu)

### WBENC

March 19-22  
Denver, CO  
[wbenc.org](http://wbenc.org)

### NSBE 50 Convention

March 20-24  
Atlanta, GA  
[nsbe.org](http://nsbe.org)

## APRIL

### Hire GI

Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
[hiregi.com](http://hiregi.com)

### From Day One Forum

Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
[fromdayone.co](http://fromdayone.co)

### Small Business Expo

Multiple Events  
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[thesmallbusinessexpo.com](http://thesmallbusinessexpo.com)

### City Career Fair

#### Diversity Employment Day

Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
[citycareerfair.com](http://citycareerfair.com)

### CSAVR 2023 Spring Conference

April 6-10  
Bethesda, MD  
[csavr.org](http://csavr.org)

### The ARC Disability Policy Seminar

April 8-10  
Washington, D.C.  
[thearc.org](http://thearc.org)

### HACU Annual Capital Forum

April 9-10  
Washington, D.C.  
[hacu.net](http://hacu.net)

### ASHHRA Conference

April 14-16  
Fort Worth, TX  
[ashhra.org](http://ashhra.org)

Events subject to change. For the complete conference calendar, visit [diverseabilitymagazine.com](http://diverseabilitymagazine.com).  
Send your conference announcements to [partnerships@diversitycomm.net](mailto:partnerships@diversitycomm.net).

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Join one of the top-rated places to work in the Federal government! The Risk Management Agency team of statisticians, underwriters, economists, program analysts, and risk management specialists thrive in a forward thinking, high-performing workplace.

### Our Mission

USDA's Risk Management Agency serves America's agricultural producers through effective, market-based risk management tools to strengthen the economic stability of farmers, ranchers, and rural communities. We are committed to increasing the availability and effectiveness of Federal crop insurance as a risk management tool.



**Pictured:** RMA Administrator Marcia Bunker with faculty of the University of Arkansas

“We are securing the future of American agriculture by developing world class risk management tools with the brightest minds in the industry.”

— Marcia Bunker, Administrator of  
USDA's Risk Management Agency

USDA's Risk Management Agency, along with the Farm Service Agency and the Natural Resources and Conservation Service, serves America's farmers and ranchers with products, programs, and training that provides economic opportunity, helps rural America thrive and nourish the nation, and preserves natural resources.

More than 22,000 employees working throughout the country share data, analysis, IT systems, real property, other resources, and implementation roles and responsibilities that are designed to support the programs benefiting our customers.

We are always looking to hire highly skilled and motivated individuals, particularly those with strengths in science, technology, engineering, and math.

We pride ourselves on ensuring our workplace is an accessible and fully inclusive environment that provides equal opportunities for all to excel and succeed.

Read more about the Risk Management Agency by scanning the QR Code on this page. For a list of current vacancies for USDA jobs, visit <https://usda.usajobs.gov/>.





## Working for the USDA Risk Management Agency

### Josh Ray, Director Central Regional Compliance Office

I grew up on a family farm in Northwest Missouri and quickly developed a deep passion for rural life. Back in 2004, while obtaining my accounting undergraduate degree, I participated in the Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP) at the University of Missouri, Kansas City. WRP is a recruitment and referral program that connects federal and private-sector employers nationwide with highly motivated college students and recent graduates with disabilities. Given Risk Management Agency (RMA)'s commitment to diversity, they reviewed my application and resume and then contacted me regarding a summer internship in their administrative accounting division. After starting as a WRP intern, I was hired part time while finishing my bachelor's degree, then transferred to RMA's Compliance division as a Compliance Investigator Trainee during law school. After the bar exam, I was hired on full time as a Compliance Investigator at the Central Regional Compliance Office. After finishing school, I moved back to the family farm as my heart lies in the realm of agriculture, a passion that has fueled my drive and ambition. On the home front, I've been blessed with a wonderful family. I've shared a loving marriage with my amazing partner, Jennifer, for 17 remarkable years. Our journey has been graced by the presence of our three incredible children: JW, Jessie, and Jacob.

Despite my genetic eye disease, which caused color blindness and legal blindness, RMA's inclusive culture provided me with countless opportunities. It turned my disability into an invitation to innovate. With adaptive technologies, such as screen readers and text-to-speech software, it empowered me to communicate, learn, and work effectively. Additionally USDA has an AgrAbility program which is a consumer-driven USDA-funded program that provides vital education, assistance, and support to farmers and ranchers with disabilities. AgrAbility helps thousands of determined individuals overcome barriers to continue their chosen professions in agriculture.

These programs allow me to work hard for farmers; evaluating private insurance companies to ensure that they are in compliance with policy and procedures set forth in the Federal Crop Insurance Act. This system of checks and balances performed by my team requires that private insurers are operating as intended; providing farmers and ranchers with the best insurance products and services possible.

RMA plays a vital role by offering agricultural producers in the United States market-based risk management tools. These tools are essential for shielding farmers from the unpredictable challenges they face, such as extreme weather events and market price fluctuations. By providing a safety net, RMA ensures the economic stability of agricultural producers and rural communities.

This stability has far-reaching effects. It secures the nation's food supply by supporting consistent agricultural production, prevents financial strain on farmers due to unexpected losses, and encourages long-term investments in sustainable farming practices.

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Read more about the Risk Management Agency by scanning the QR Code on this page. For a list of current vacancies for USDA jobs, visit <https://usda.usajobs.gov/>.



Josh Ray







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